

# Aide-de-Camp's Library



सत्यमेव जयते

Rashtrapati Bhavan  
New Delhi

Accn. No. 1218

Call No. VIII (A) - A

\_\_\_\_\_





# BUGLE BLAST



*by the same authors*  
**BUGLE BLAST**

*First Series*

*Second Series*

*Third Series*

# BUGLE BLAST

AN ANTHOLOGY

*Fourth Series*

*Edited by*

JACK AISTROP

*and*

REGINALD MOORE

LONDON

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

First published in 1947  
All rights reserved

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
C. TINLING & CO., LTD., LIVERPOOL, LONDON AND PRESCOT

## FOREWORD

From this Series onwards BUGLE BLAST is open to receive work from all writers. This does not mean that we are deserting our original intention of making the collection a chronicle of our time, or, more important, that we are going back on our resolve to do everything within our small powers to assist new writers. It means that we have been suddenly surrounded by more or less peaceful conditions after six years of chaos and abnormality, as a consequence of which new horizons are brought into focus. Our writers are or will soon be out of the Services, so naturally BUGLE BLAST also must check in its uniform.

BUGLE BLAST now appears in two languages: a special edition is published in French by Les Editions Libres, Brussels, and read in France and Belgium. In our poetry supplement to this Series will be found the work of a few of our colleagues on the Continent; but in the future we hope they will be represented even more fully.

JACK AISTROP  
REGINALD MOORE



# Contents

## 1 THE UNSETTLED

In Galilee	David Martin	11
The Danger of Keeping Imaginary Dogs	John Sommerfield	21
The Dead Don't Eat	Martin Jordan	25
The Blessing that must be Earned	Freda Aykroyd	31
Incident in Iowa	George Mills	44
Knight Errant	Arthur Calder-Marshall	49
Lieutenant Li	John Silby	58
Victory Dance	Alan Wykes	66
The Green Madness	J. T. Brockway	71

## 2 THOSE AT HOME

The Grey Parrot	Michal James	83
There's Always a Way in the Army	Samuel W. Taylor	93
The Lighter	Eva Metzger	106
The Night Cooks' Hut	Joan Knape	110
The Unholy Trinity	Patricia Ledward	119

## 3 THOSE RETURNING

The Way Back	Sylvia Townsend Warner	129
The Round-Up	Boris Yampolsky	136
Our Convert	Gerard Pilkington	141
Peace is Your Ticket, Charley	Anthony Bloomfield	152
Dear Son Harold	G. Thurston Hopkins	158
The Empty Sky	Benedict Thielen	172

4 "LONELY AS ANGELS"  
(Poetry Supplement)

Poetry is Happiness	Wrey Gardiner	191
The Climate of War	Kenneth Patchen	191
Is It Peace?	Alan Rook	193
Poem	Charles Lambert	193
Poem	Roger de Lannay	194
A Man Freed from a Death-Camp	Prosper de Dyaultergem	195
The New People	Michel de Smet	196
Gigha	W. S. Graham	197
Voices at Midnight	Richard Goodman	197
Comfort Me Now, My Love	S. D. Tremayne	198
The Woe-Waters	Jocelyn Brooke	199



I  
THE UNSETTLED







# In Galilee

by DAVID MARTIN

ONE morning Shura and Jehuda set out from Mishmar ha Galil on horseback to visit the Arab village that hung on the summit of a bare mountain, some six or seven miles from the new settlement. On clear days the village was well visible from Mishmar ha Galil, it appeared then like an irregular heap of brown cubes that had been scattered carelessly over the crest.

It was a "good" village, it had given no trouble when Mishmar ha Galil was most vulnerable, a few months ago. That was when the first *Chaluzim* had arrived from their parent settlement on the shores of Lake Tiberias. They had come with five lorries carrying only what was most necessary during the earliest days of possession—timber and wire for the parapet behind which the men could work in safety, materials for an observation tower in the centre of the camp from which the surrounding country could be searched by sharp eyes, a few pre-fabricated huts, tents, some arms, a searchlight and food.

The Arabs from the village on the mountain top, poor peasants, had come down to the valley to watch this outbreak of purposeful activity from a distance. Gravely, holding their sons by their hands, they stood in clusters and pointed out to each other the new implements which the Jews had brought with them. When the two Fordson tractors had lumbered forth in opposite directions from the stockade a few days later to plough the circling furrow

that, according to the old Osman law, would finally establish the land rights of the newcomers, there had been no stoning of the drivers and no sniping. Some Fellahim had gone so far as to admire the powerful gear; no sadness was in their questions.

The day of inauguration had come and passed without incident, the representative of the National Fund had made a speech of dedication, delegates from other collective farms had inspected and improved the pioneer arrangements, and a simple feast in the evening was followed by a stupendous night of dancing and singing that resounded until the dawn. Yes, even presents had been sent from the Arab village on the mountain, fruit and seasonable vegetables. Two boys had carried this load of goodwill, they were accompanied by a very old man in holiday garb who expressed many amiable sentiments. He was sent home contentedly with bags of coffee and flasks of fine oil.

Shura and Jehuda were on their way to return the compliments. Shura was a small and swarthy fellow, middle-aged, a Russian who had lived in the country ever since he could remember. He spoke Arabic as fluently as his mother tongue. Jehuda belonged to the new element, he was an Hungarian who had arrived in Palestine only recently. He was listening to his older companion who spoke to him of the Arabs and their ways and the things that must be avoided if one wished to keep their friendship. These, of course, were the days of unrest and nothing lasting could be attempted, nothing from below that was not sure to be wrecked from above. But Shura could remember occasions of fraternisation when Arab villagers had honoured their Jewish neighbours with spectacular *Fantasias*. As always in Erez Israel there were dangers in abandon: once a *Fantasia* had ended in tragedy,

feud and bitterness. When the welcoming cavalcade of shouting horsemen had passed, and the last joyous salvo had been fired into the air, one among the guests lay on the ground with a bullet in his heart. Even the district court could not decide whether it had been an accident or murder.

A dry wind was blowing from Transjordan, carrying with it the smell of the desert. Although they had covered not more than two miles on gently rising slopes, the horses were already sweating. Beneath and behind the two riders the valley lay like the hulk of a new ship on the stocks, flat and broad in the centre, narrowing to steeper flanks at both ends. Where it was widest, the huts and tents of Mishmar ha Galil were evenly spread. Smoke was rising and curling low over the brown sand that was only beginning to take on the aspect of fields, with the measured, self-confident cruising of the tractors leaving behind a dark wake of upturned soil.

At the western extremity of the valley, where the mountains closed around, the white shadows of an older settlement could be seen, houses surrounded by the faint green of a newly planted afforestation. But in the valley itself there were no trees apart from a few forlorn clusters of tamarisks whose branches pointed in the direction of the prevailing wind. It was said that once every slope and every ravine here had been thickly wooded, but that was before the successive waves of invaders had cut down the trees to light their fires. The last to make away with what remained of the once dense forests were the armies of Liman von Sanders Pasha, in the last war, before Allenby's aeroplanes and Australian soldiers had driven them in headlong confusion through this valley and across into Syria where no rest awaited them.

The track steepened under the hooves of the horses and

the two men fell silent. They were surrounded by an almost unearthly quietness, there was no sound, only the breathing of the animals, the sharp swishing of their tails and the crushing of loose pebbles. This was the romantic silence of Galilee, in which the past and the future become the present.

Suddenly Shura reined his horse: "Listen!"

From around a bend came the sound of an agonised human voice. It was a fierce moan, long drawn out, rising to a discordant cry. A cry like no other the men had ever heard.

Shura and Jehuda spurred on their horses. A few paces further on a square patch of even ground opened out before them. It was the outlying holding of an Arab peasant, a small field, watered from a derelict enclosed well in one corner and surrounded by a cactus hedge. An enormous and solitary oak spread its branches by the well. In its shadow, her face to the ground, lay the writhing form of a girl. Before she had been convulsed she had been hoeing among the cabbages that dotted the field in a scanty crop; she still gripped in her hands the wooden handle of a turiah. Her long black skirt was drawn up around her thighs and her strong bare feet were beating the ground. The presence of the strangers pierced her mind, still moaning she turned on her side to stare at the men with an expression of unspeakable terror.

Shura dismounted and went over to the girl. When he turned again to the younger man a half-smile was on his face: "She's giving birth," he said. "The first time by the looks of it. She can't be more than fifteen." He added: "It's nothing, they are hardy as mules. Many of their babies are born like this, in a field; she'll soon be alright." He went over to the well and drew up water in a wooden pail. An earthenware beaker lay on the

ground by the girl, scooping up water he held the vessel to her mouth. At first she refused to open her lips but he spoke to her with insistence in her own language till at last she drank.

"She's only a child," Jehuda said. He had never beheld a woman in labour and he was frightened, he could not share Shura's certainty that all would be well. In him the instincts and traditions of a European were stronger and the brutal rawness of the scene disturbed and shocked him. His intellect realised that in coming to Palestine he had touched the fringe of a different world, and he had been taught by those who knew more about it than he did that the safest way was not to penetrate it too deeply, that it was better to remain on the Jewish side of the border. To him she was not an Arab, but a girl, a girl in labour, perhaps leaving life. He dared not look on her too closely, afraid that he might see the child breaking through. This sight, he knew, would unman him.

Shura suggested for Jehuda to stay with the girl, while he would ride to the village of her people to tell them of her premature plight. But the other demurred: it was a steep climb to the summit. It would take some time before help would come and even then it would be necessary to transport the girl all the painful way uphill. Better far to carry her down to their own settlement where more experienced hands were waiting. Let the first child on their land be the son or daughter of the hunter rather than the shepherd, Arab rather than Jew, it would be no bad omen, but a firmer bond of friendship.

Shura shook his head doubtfully; nothing but trouble could follow. Their own comrades would not be too pleased and, should the girl not survive, her family would accuse the Jews of having killed her. At best bitter com-

plaints and recriminations would ensue, but not unlikely something far worse. No, it would be much safer not to meddle with the girl; she herself perhaps had come into the world in similar fashion. It was almost unbelievable what sufferings Arabs could go through unharmed, and if the worst came to the worst, *malesh*, it would be God's will and there would be no accusations.

"Nonsense", Jehuda said, "she's coming with us."

His sympathy and his youth were stronger than Shura's caution, and the older one yielded. Jehuda mounted. Shura gently wrapped the girl in the light blanket that he carried under his saddle and lifted her to his comrade who grasped her and placed her before him over his horse. Gingerly they descended towards the valley.

\* \* \* \*

The baby was born before noon in a hut in Mishmar ha Galil. It was a girl, very tiny, but the birth had been most difficult. The nurse of the settlement had been unable to deal with such an unforeseen emergency, but an urgent message had summoned a doctor from the next town. He had used his instruments, now the young mother lay in deadly exhaustion. Another messenger had returned from the village on the mountain whence he had been despatched to carry news of the confinement; he brought polite greetings but nothing else, neither the girl's husband, father or mother came with him.

They did not come during any of the days that followed.

The girl—her name was Leila—lay silently in the room that had been cleared for her with her daughter by her side. She was still too weak to be moved and she spent the long days in looking out through the window from which the growing, dusty camp could be seen. Her dark eyes often wandered over the strange contents of the room,

the bookshelves, photographs of Lenin and Arlosorov, the washstand. The nurse who was looking after her could speak no Arabic and soon gave up attempts to divert the young mother.

Other girls came in now and again after working hours to admire Leila's baby that held on to life with tenacity. The little girl accepted all attentions with composure. She looked no different from Jewish babies, her skin was light, and there was nothing outlandish about her crying. At first Leila followed with suspicion each hygienic manoeuvre on the part of the nurse, the daily weighing especially causing her some alarm. But when she saw that her daughter prospered, and that she, too, gradually began to regain strength, her fears receded.

But she could not get used to the doctor who twice returned to remove stitches and to bandage her. The first time he attempted to approach her, Leila resisted him with what little strength she could rally and all the soothings of the nurse did not quieten her. After he had left she wept helplessly for a long time and that evening her temperature rose threateningly. This was repeated on his second visit two days later, so that it was decided that the mother would have to get on as best she could without the help of a physician.

The people of Mishmar ha Galil were of divided opinion. There were those who looked upon their guest with misgivings as a harbinger of coming troubles, others—most of the women among them—were enjoying Leila's presence which, though in a most unobtrusive way, made itself felt. There was never any shortage of sentimental gestures, the nursery was colourful with flowers and, in spite of the women's crushing labours in the field and about the yard, the Arab baby could boast of a quickly growing wardrobe such as was rarely possessed by the offspring of a Fellah.



As she grew stronger, Leila was encouraged to leave her room. For some days she was often seen, sitting on a low chair in the sun outside. She had been given European clothes which became her well enough, but she always wore a long coat which entirely hid her form. She was still too shy to reply to the greetings of the few men who spoke Arabic, but she followed with undisguised fascination the doings of the Jewish girls. Asking no questions it was difficult to see what was in her mind, but it was possible to infer that she wondered at the freedom which they enjoyed. Her eyes followed couples who were strolling about arm in arm. She listened to the voices of the girls, raised in equal argument, and to their self-confident singing.

But still no one came from her village to take her home. There was no enquiry how she was faring, and the old man, the village's bearer of goodwill, was not seen again. A fortnight passed during which Leila recovered her strength. With colour flooding once more into her cheeks and the raven's gloss returning to her hair, she was lovely, the most beautiful girl in Mishmar ha Galil.

The day came when she was well enough to be returned to her family. A cart was to take her the greater part of the way until the road became too steep, the rest she would have to walk but Shura and the nurse would go with her. Most of the men and women were out in the fields when the small procession set out. Leila, dressed again in her native garments with her still nameless daughter in her arms, sat on a bed of straw in the back of the cart. The nurse, by her side, clasped the baby's belongings. Shura drove.

\* \* \* \*

A few days later the rains began. The dry ravines

which rilled the flanks of the mountains now poured foaming torrents into the valley. The ditches that surrounded the tents ran over and had to be deepened and widened. The dusty sand of the camp became impassable mud and all work in the fields came to a standstill. Those settlers who had come from the South swore that they had never seen such deluge, but those who had lived in Galilee declared that it was nothing and that the present abundance of rain would be praised when spring came for the spring of Galilee is richer and prouder than any other spring.

The heavy beating of the rain at night overlay all other sounds. Like a curtain, it obscured visibility. Wrapped in their heavy leather cloaks the *shomrim*, the outposts, were making their rounds with curses, in a night like this the searchlight was of no use. The late lights shone dimly from the huts, they only accentuated the dreary isolation of the new collective.

It was Jehuda who first saw the figure coming on him from out of the dark. He challenged. He got no reply but did not fire, recognising in time that this was no enemy. He played his powerful electric torch full on the silent human form before him. It was Leila, battered and near collapse.

Jehuda picked her up and carried her back to the huts, where he left her in the care of the nurse. All the men were driven out from the room in which Leila's daughter was born. She took off the torn shawl in which the girl was wrapped. Under it, pressed against her breast, she held her baby as in a cramp. The child was dead, perished of exposure.

Leila's face and body were battered and broken. Blood clotted her eyes and her mouth, her arms, her breasts and her limbs were covered with bloody weals. The bones

in her left hand were smashed and one of her nipples had been split by a terrible blow. Fever drove through her and her wide open eyes glowed with the coals of insanity. Her father had done this to her.

Miraculously she lived. She never spoke of what had befallen her after her return, and how she had made the fantastic decision to take refuge in Mishmar ha Galil. As before, she lay in her bed silently.

As soon as she could travel, an ambulance took her to Haifa, for greater safety. The men of Mishmar went about their work armed for quite some time, prepared for a raid of vengeance. But nothing happened, the brown village on the mountain had withdrawn into itself. And as the weeks went by, tension eased.

Leila? I do not know what has happened to her. Probably the French nuns took pity on her and gave her shelter in one of their convents where young Arab girls are trained to become servants in the houses of officials in Damascus or Aleppo.

# The Danger of Keeping Imaginary Dogs

by JOHN SOMMERFIELD

WE were talking about Freddie. He had come overseas with a small cardboard suitcase full of flutes, penny whistles, and other small wind instruments. From the Middle East he went to Singapore, retreated all through the East Indies, landed up in Australia, was sent to India and finished up in our squadron, in Burma, leaving behind him a trail of lost, sold, and discarded articles of kit but always sticking to his suitcase of wind instruments and augmenting their number with snake charmers' pipes, nose flutes, and exotic piccolos. "He was puddled" said Chalky. "He was round the bend" . . . meaning that he was a natural eccentric whose quirks and oddities had been forced into a hothouse growth by three years of hardship in the tropics.

We were at Firpo's bar, Calcutta, boozing. A few hours ago there had been the jungle, the dusty airstrip, an excruciating monotony of hard work and discomfort, with always the slight danger of sudden death in the background. Now we were on leave, under the electric fans, listening to the tinkling of ice in our glasses and rejoicing in an unaccustomed luxury of chairs and tables. The abruptness of the transition was exhilarating. It was a bit too much for us and we had to discuss the place and people we had been so glad to get away from. For encourage-

ment there were two airmen at our table, just arrived from England and on their way to Burma . . . . Bombay Zombies we called the type, on account of their white skins: you could tell them from a distance by the way they didn't know how to wear their bush hats.

"Yeah," said Slush, "Freddie was dead puddled alright. Remember his wooden sword." He turned to the Zombies. "He made a *huge* great wooden sword, and he used to paint big curly moustaches on his face with boot polish. Then he'd fix up his bush hat with a high crown, throw his waterproof cape over his shoulders, put on his gumboots and walk up and down the tents challenging chaps to duels."

"Sounds crackers to me," said one of the Zombies, a serious-looking youth with a strong Lancashire accent.

"Crackers!" said Chalky. "That's *nothing*. You'll see when you've been out a bit. Chaps go crackers all the time. We had a bloke Henry his name was, who used to lie in bed and scream for hours when he wasn't pretending to talk Chinese. Henry . . . ."

"Time for a drink," said Slush, draining a full glass. He ordered another round and went on talking. "You know how it is in the flicks," he said. "Chap comes staggering in from the desert, in the nick of time . . . *hundreds* of miles he's done . . . . bringing the secret documents and he passes out on the deck when he's reached wherever it is. Well, that was a favourite stunt of Freddie's. He'd throw open the door of the basha . . ."

"What's a basha?" asked the serious Zombie.

"A place made of straw and bamboo and stuff . . . you live in the bloody thing unless you're in tents which you most likely will be. Anyway, this chap would throw open the door, step over the lizards, and stand there, gasping and rolling his eyes. Then suddenly he'd fall flat on his

face, come down a *hell* of a crash . . . highly dramatic it was too. And he'd lie there until the chaps had stopped laughing and taking notice. Then he'd get up quietly and walk over to his charp."

"His *what*?" said the Zombie.

"His charpoy . . . his bed," said Slush, irritably. "Now comes the bitter bit, the moral of the story as you might say. One day he lurches over to the flight office, stands in the tent opening for a moment, and flakes out. Chiefy Taylor is sitting there making up his monthly returns and he just says "Cut it out Freddie, I'm busy," and goes on writing. Good half hour later he looks round and the sod's still lying there, stiff as a board. Turns out he's three quarters dead with all kinds of malaria, and they have to cart him off on a stretcher to slow music."

"Did he die then?" said the other Zombie, hitherto silent, but now concerned-looking.

"Die!" said Slush scornfully. "Course not. Chaps like Freddie don't *die*. He got posted . . . We had a wizard party for it, hundred bottles of wog liquor there was . . . gin, whisky, and rum, all in plain bottles, you could tell which was supposed to be which by the colour of the stuff . . . it all *tasted* like furniture polish . . ."

Slush was talking too fast, his straight, yellow hair kept falling across his forehead, and there was a slightly mad look in his eyes that I'd seen before when he'd been drinking. The night ahead of us would be full of incident.

"Then there was old Bill Finnegan," said Chalky, bobbing up again into the conversation. "Turned up on the flight one morning with his boots polished, nice clean shirt on, sten gun and ammo, but no trousers. Couldn't get him to put his trousers on. Said it was all a plot against him. He's in the looney bin now."

I thought of Freddie's farewell party, the crowded basha

full of noise and heat and smells of sweat and liquor, the singing and the beating of tin cans, the board on which we chalked the score of those who passed out as they were carried away and put to bed, the fight between Puddled Perce and Harry the Dripper, the other fights, all the manifestations of unrepression, and the gamblers in the middle of the floor, dead serious, playing brag for high stakes, oblivious to the uproar that raged around them. And Freddie himself, decorated with boot polish moustaches, leaning against the wall, naked except for a limp, greasy topee, on the front of which was painted in dirty, red dope, "Here I come" and on the back, "There I go," playing a melancholy tootle on one of his flutes, not listening and not being listened to by Lofty Hudson who, balancing himself on an invisible tight rope, tears streaming down his face, was telling him about the horrors of Dunkirk—a place where he had never been.

"When we was in the Middle East," said Slush, fixing the Zombies with a rigid stare, "It got so bad with chaps cracking their whips all over the place and shouting at their sledge teams that there was an order put up forbidding airmen to keep imaginary dogs . . . caused a lot of bad feeling it did, too."

# The Dead Don't Eat

by MARTIN JORDAN

You could tell it was winter again in the Russian compound without going outside the barrack. Everyone got more lice, and there was less talk of women and more of food. There was a mental steam you could smell, with the sharp edge of savoury condiments in it; but when reality came, it was nothing but damp clothes, mice, and the rags they wrapped their feet in. Last night, Fedor Robsolschenko had got into the next door compound, where the Englishers lived. He had come back with a cigarette, and divided it into halves for his comrades, Pupkin and Hubenskajik. On the way back, Robsolschenko had run foul of Prinz, the wickedest of Alsatian dogs. But he had drawn blood from the snout of this animal with the well-aimed welt of his boot.

Robsolschenko stopped talking about food. The truth was, Hubenskajik was very sick. His eyes looked as if their owner had gone for a journey and left a card: OUT.

Hubenskajik had fallen sick days before. Nobody had advised him to see the German M.O. Only dying people saw the German M.O. Only infectious diseases went down with the German M.O. So Hubenskajik took to his bunk.

It was too late now. Neglect to report meant medical stores wasted: which meant sabotage.

Twice a day, the Russians were counted by the *Unteroffizier*, assisted by Prinz to keep order. The problem was,



to get Hubenskajik outside and keep him standing. Yesterday Robsolschenko's arm had been enough, but Hubenskajik had fainted this morning, and Robsolschenko had had a tussle to keep him up. It was very necessary that he should attend parade; otherwise he would go to hospital; one ration less would be delivered to the barrack. As it was, Hubenskajik took nothing but a morsel of bread, dipped in soup, and Robsolschenko's protestations as he ate the rest were getting less and less loud.

Hubenskajik died before dawn one day, without a scene.

Only Pupkin, who was of the infrequent Slav type which is small and dark, like a Latin, said he was ready to cry. Robsolschenko talked about the eternal. There lay Hubenskajik . . . but where was his taste for *blutwurst*, his habit of pulling out little hairs from his nostrils? And the cold feet of which he used to complain? These questions were cut short, because something would have to be done about Hubenskajik before the morning parade; if Robsolschenko regarded him as a symbol, the Germans wouldn't.

The problem was: what to do? Robsolschenko alone was certain. Telling the *Feldwebel* meant that the barrack-corporal would be punished for having a corpse on his hands; and the rations due to Hubenskajik would vanish; which was heartbreaking. So the body should be kept. The body was Hubenskajik's dying gift.

Lavinov, the barrack-corporal, and Schenkewski, who was a superstitious Pole, both objected vaguely; and Robsolschenko, out of his great knowledge of humanity, saw the truth behind their objections, and said: "After all, Hubenskajik's rations wouldn't be enough for everyone. What's a mouthful to a hungry man?"

The morning parade, which followed, went off well. There, in the rear rank, stood Pupkin and Robsolschenko,

and between them, as in life, stood the late soldier of the Red Army, Hubenskajik. Prinz strained and snarled, and he was the only uneasy German present. All the same, the final dismiss was welcomed, because an unforeseen factor had set in: *rigor mortis*, in fact. It had taken Robsolschenko some time to get him like a soldier at attention, and afterwards he had started to bend from the waist, like a hinged trouser-press.

That evening, the two guardians were eating Hubenskajik's bread and skilly when Lavinov struck. He was a cultured, literate man. Hubenskajik had obviously died of tuberculosis. His corpse was unsafe. Not a thousand metres away (Lavinov said) was a pit, filled with tuberculosis cases in 1942. Robsolschenko must give it up.

Robsolschenko settled into oratory for the rest of the evening. They were soldiers at war. War meant risk. Soldiers drank dirty water and slept in mud and couldn't afford to look into the past when it came to ration-meat or women. But he wound up the defence by telling Lavinov that he, Lavinov, could have Hubenskajik's next issue of skilly.

After that, the affair went well for three days: then Lavinov demanded another go at Hubenskajik's skilly. Robsolschenko replied with an offer to sell Lavinov the corpse for a pair of fur gloves; but Lavinov refused. Nothing was settled.

The parades got difficult. Prinz was troublesome. But Hubenskajik grew more resilient. "It won't last," Pupkin said. "He'll be tacky soon."

Towards the end of the week, the dog's efforts to get into the rear rank were frenzied; the *Unteroffizier* had a job to hold him. Discovery seemed a likely thing, and men, who had kept silent before, now urged Robsolschenko to give up the body. There was also the consider-

ation of Smell. During the daytime Robsolschenko kept his friend in a locker, and, although the weather was frosty, the heat of men in the barrack-room made it a bad mortuary.

That night, Lavinov said to Robsolschenko:

"Get it out and bury it at once."

"Or what?"

"I'll tell the Germans."

"Then we'll all be for it."

"Not me. The informer gets off."

"I'll sell you Hubenskajik for two bowls of skilly,"

"Nobody wants him."

Everybody began talking at Robsolschenko. It was clear that he would have to act.

"I can't bury him. The ground's too hard to dig a hole."

"You could cut him up and burn him in the stove," Lavinov said.

But Pupkin said that the smell would make the room uninhabitable for days, and Schenkewski objected on the grounds of tell-tale bloodstains, and added that the sight of raw meat, even though it be the remains of a comrade, would undoubtedly be torturesome to so many hungry men. To Robsolschenko, however, grave-digging in the compound presented many difficulties. From a platform in one corner, a searchlight, manned by an armed *posten*, swept the place from end to end; furthermore, it seemed impossible to do such a job without noise . . .

Then the air-raid siren sounded and the lights in the room went out. No searchlight, at least. They pinioned Robsolschenko while someone went to fetch the fire shovel, which was the only digging tool the room had. Two men carried the body, and soon Robsolschenko was alone in a secluded part of the compound, the shovel in his hand

and Hubenskajik at his feet. The darkness hid the ground, which rang hard against his shovel as he got to work, the whole surface of his skin a listening cell. He could have heard the sigh of falling feathers as he started on the topsoil.

The first nine inches took him ninety minutes, during which a sentry had coughed, ack-ack guns sounded miles away and a few planes went over. Below, the soil gave to the shovel; another half hour saw him sunk to the groins.

Then a *posten* shouted: "*Wer ist dort?*" and repeated, "*Wer ist dort?*"

The camp regulations said that anyone found outside during an air raid would be shot at sight. Of course, the *posten* was blinded by the blackout. But the following words floated across:

"*Halt, oder ich schiessel!*"

Robsolschenko squatted in the hole and looked at the point from which the words had come. Suddenly it gave birth to a rifle shot, and the bullet went over Robsolschenko and spent itself in layers of *diminuendo*. Then came the sounds of feet on ice, the click of a bolt, low voices, the barking of Prinz. To stay or to run? The body of Hubenskajik said: stay . . . as Robsolschenko reasoned afterwards, when he tried to account for it.

There followed a scuffle at the gate and a dainty *pad pad pad*. Prinz was in the compound, but alone. He could hear the eager ground-sniffing. Without preliminaries, the dog came out of the dark and into the grave. In one moment, Robsolschenko was staring at nothing; in the next, he was in contact with warm fur and avid jaws. With loving economy, Prinz's teeth sought Robsolschenko's throat. But his forearm, interposed, met them squarely. A continuous growl came from Prinz's gullet, and Robsol-

schenko could see the eyes, transfigured by a dutiful hatred. There was a cracking sound, and his arm jarred to the elbow. He was surprised to find that he had struck Prinz hard upon the crown with the fire shovel; even more astonished to find that the teeth had been withdrawn and that silence had returned. Quickly, he tipped Hubenskajik into the grave. And then it started to snow. At the same time there were sounds of voices and fiddlings with the gate in the wire. Robsolschenko returned and stamped down the earth at breakneck speed; then, with the unprotesting Prinz under one arm, he ran for the barrack-room.

\* \* \* \*

It snowed for three days, and then it froze. Hubenskajik was never found.

When Robsolschenko got back to the barrack, he strangled Prinz carefully with a bit of rope and hid him in the locker. No sooner had this been done than the all-clear sounded, the lights came on and the slightly feverish groping of the searchlight was resumed outside. And then the Germans called an emergency roll-call, counted everyone twice, examined the wire with torches and went away.

Prinz was skinned and drawn in the morning, and made a tasty meal in which the whole barrack joined. Later, certain offal being found in the stove by the *Unteroffizier*, an enquiry was held. There was no evidence. The men were obstructive or simply silent. But it was felt that an example should be made. Lavinov, after all, was the principal corporal in the barrack, and Prinz, after all, had been government property, and sabotage was still a capital crime. So they shot Lavinov one morning at dawn. Which meant another ration off the strength, Robsolschenko said.

# The Blessing that must be Earned

by FREDA AYKROYD

HIS shyness did not help him to decide whether hers was natural charm or the manner of just another English woman trying to be polite to an Indian.

"That can come down now," she said, pointing to the poster: "Some birds talk too much," (the parrot with a ribbon tied in a large bow around its beak). "Well, for my part, the word security made me want to blab all I knew. It is hard to believe it is all over."

He nodded and smiled, looking down at his blotter. The fan whirled above their heads and disturbed her hair.

The telephone rang. They had been waiting for it.

"Two iced coffees and a tin of Players," he said. His voice was soft, he almost whispered into the receiver. "Two iced coffees, yes. And a tin of Players." Almost self-consciously soft, she thought. Perhaps everyone here is voice-conscious.

Now he had to repeat it in Hindustani and she felt uncomfortable. "Why," she thought, "must Indians always speak to each other in English if Europeans are near?" She stared at the poster, pretending not to notice he was speaking Hindustani. The feeling of guilt which she loathed and resented hung like a mist about her chair. She'd felt it first standing in the blazing sun, reading in amazement the inscription over the entrance to the North

Block of the Secretariat in New Delhi. Only it had not been like a mist that day but like a bucket of scalding water thrown slap all over her: "Liberty will not descend to a people. A people must raise themselves to liberty. It is a blessing that must be earned before it can be enjoyed."

And he was thinking how unlike European and Indian women were. Yet he did not want to think about being Indian just then. Something in him that wanted, how wistfully, to be with her as one of her own kind, yet something with a hardness in its core, wished just for this moment he were not Indian. It was only with the white women he felt like this; with a very few, three in his whole life. With the men it was all hardness, fierce smouldering hatred, ready to blaze, beneath the superficial liking and appreciation of their obvious qualities. The Sikh with his knife stood guard, always, over this weakness in him. He relied on the Sikh though he sometimes gave him a push and sent him flying. The Sikh always came back, nodding his head and with a sneer . . . "You see . . . you see!" He was always right. The more often he was right the more he belonged to him. He gave him a push now: he put down the telephone receiver, pretending to be annoyed. "These damned chokras," he said, one with her against the inefficiency of the Indian. He spoke without an accent and he found a swear word now and then brought him nearer.

He offered her the last cigarette in the tin.

"Won't you?" she said and as he shook his head, "but of course not, you're a Sikh," and he could have sworn she was genuine and not just showing an interest in the primitive taboos. "And don't you drink either?"

He laughed, quietly but with much pleasure.

"Like a fish," he said with relish, thinking of the pleasure of it and of letting himself go.

She wanted to get on with it. They always hung about, using any excuse to postpone the moment of action. Perhaps it was the heat. The word action induced a nausea and listlessness. It was just bearable here under the fan. She felt the sweat running down her legs. She uncrossed them. He was wearing a grey knitted scarf with a hole in it around his neck.

"Aren't you hot?" she said looking at it and before she could stop herself. He shook his head and his mouth set. His lips were red in his black beard. She thought: "I've never seen an Indian with red lips before. And I've hurt him." Her mind set up a little wail. She leaned forward and looked into his sad Indian eyes.

"I'm rude, aren't I?" she said.

He shook his head slowly and smiled with his lips shut. The telephone rang again. He whispered into it.

"Studio eleven is free. We can go now," he said.

They showed their passes to the sentries with bayonets at the entrance to the studios. She made a surprised face but he was serious. It was cool in the air-conditioned corridors and her ears were woolly with the deadness of sound.

He adjusted the microphone over the red baize table.

"Sit a little nearer," he said. He was efficient, proud of his job.

"When I give you the red light begin to read," he said.

Her mind took in the words on the old news bulletin. He left the studio and then looked coldly at her through the sloping glass wall of the booth. She felt lonely and nervous. The red light went on like an eye opening. It had an unsympathetic yet busy personality. "It is nothing to do with me now," it seemed to say. "I've told you you can start and now it's up to you."

It was not very difficult, for the news announcer had



marked the stresses and pauses for himself, but her breath was uncontrolled and let her down once or twice before the end of a sentence. She did not see the eye shut and went on reading.

"Thank you," Khwaja's voice said and she jumped. She looked at him through the glass. His lips were moving and his voice spoke beside her. "Now try the musical announcements."

This was more difficult: they were written in pencil in a woman's hand-writing, scored out and written over. She stumbled in the reading.

"Thank you," Khwaja's voice said again, low-toned. The red light went out in a final sort of way. She leaned back in the scarlet and chromium chair feeling a little desperate.

Khwaja came into the studio, rejoining his voice.

"Not bad," he said. He touched her shoulder and she was grateful. He quickly withdrew his hand.

"And not too good?"

"Oh, you've a pleasant voice and you speak clearly . . . and you are intelligent." He smiled "You need practice."

They walked along the corridors peering through the round glass windows in the doors of the studios. "Like a speakeasy," she said. He laughed and it surprised her, a high-pitched girlish laugh.

They watched an Indian orchestra. The musicians sat on the floor upon a large, green carpet, leaning against long bolsters. An old man with a white beard beat with his palms and fingers upon a hide drum.

"He's the greatest tambla player in India," said Khwaja, and she realised that he loved his work.

She did not understand the music; it sounded discordant to her Western ear, yet it moved her.

They came out again at the door by the bayonets, back into the oven. A girl met them, pulling at her sari.

"This is Miss Bannerjee. She'll teach you the levers and turntables," he said.

"Don't forget you're giving me drinks tonight, Khwaja," said Miss Bannerjee with a lot of laughter. "Don't forget I like cocktail sausages."

She was being modern and emancipated. The guilt came back and Mary could not smile or take part. And she knew he knew it was there. She did not know he mistook it for a feeling of pride and superiority. The Sikh with the knife sneered and hatred for Miss Bannerjee mounted in Khwaja.

As Mary collected her bag and a programme in his office a young Englishman came in.

"Oh, Mr. Singh—I—we're having a party on Wednesday night. You will come, won't you?" he sounded too eager yet bored.

Khwaja looked pleased but pretended not to care over much.

"Sit down a moment. Have a cigarette. Please."

The young man didn't want to stay, but he sat down, sighing. He glanced at Mary, meaningly.

Khwaja introduced them and Captain Moody took a cigarette.

"Thanks, thanks." He glanced at the clock.

"And may I bring Mrs. Meredith?" said Khwaja out of the blue.

She was angry and embarrassed. But Captain Moody had brought the mist back into the room, indeed was the very genii of it, so she made no protestations.

"Oh, do, do," said Captain Moody irritably, counting the unwanted guests. "I *must* go." He got up.

"No, please. Don't go," said Khwaja. He liked com-

pany. And he loved a party. It made him one with them, equal . . . superior when it came to drinking, even though it knocked him out. Well if not that, superior to the Hindus who didn't drink at all. He got up, too, ready to offer another cigarette.

"Wednesday at 7-30," said Captain Moody, having got it over.

"And," said Khwaja anxiously, "do I change or can I come like this?" he touched the scarf with a hole in it delicately.

The young man's face flickered for a second.

"Oh, anything you like, old boy," and he went out.

Khwaja told the tonga-driver to wait and climbed down. He patted the horse and looked up at the night sky. He sighed. The cool night was a relief.

She'd said 7-30 and it was just quarter-past. She must not know he had arrived too early, she'd think him servile. It was good to rest after the rush he had had. Leaving the office at 6-30, walking so fast in the heat—it was tiring. He lived well out of the town, rents were cheaper further out. His university education and honours degrees brought him a job he enjoyed but no money. What was money? he asked himself. Most of his friends thought of nothing else. He was broadminded—he, too, could resent the West, but none the less his friends let themselves be too tied by tradition and their religions. Much too tied. Yet he sometimes felt lonely being so broad-minded: she would not care or notice what he was, and he knew his friends often laughed at him, drawing closer together amongst themselves. He spat because the Sikh was nodding his head. "Communism is the only thing for this country," he told the stars, and knew how emptily his heart echoed the thought. He was sick of his country's problems and had not the capacity to try to do anything

about them—though it was a chronic sickness and he cared all the time.

He looked up at the lighted windows of her flat and imagined her telling her husband, the judge, how bored she was at having to go out with an Indian. He walked a few steps at that, irritable with himself. Why did he always torment himself with suspicion of the motives of the English? He suspected patronage and looked for it. They knew of the suspicion and their efforts to allay it made their contacts strained and unreal. Why did he care? Why not chuck it all? Marry some Indian girl, and clap her into purdah at that. He'd know where he was then. He'd nearly done it once. But they all seemed so uneducated, and those who were educated seemed naïve and too eager to establish their freedom. And they tended to grow fat and he abominated fat women.

He thought of Mary and her unselfconscious ways; of her genuine interests, which he'd discovered in the past two days, and which were so unlike the shrill enthusiasms of the Indian girls he knew. She had a cool intelligence and judgment. There was nothing cool about Indian women . . . excepting Kamala and she had chosen to marry someone else.

He saw Mary coming down the stairs and a limitless loneliness possessed him.

"I'm not late?"

"No. I've just arrived myself." He got into the tonga besides her. "You're not snobbish about tongas? I couldn't get a taxi." She knew he could only just afford a tonga—and not too often.

"You wear white?" It was the nearest he could get to a compliment. He was wearing a dinner jacket and black woollen trousers with a white fleck in them. She looked at his wine-coloured turban with a glint of silver in it, and

his curling beard, and she felt a warm fondness for him.

"You're very sweet to me, Kwaja," she said.

"Don't be silly." He was surprised at himself. But she had a way, incredibly, of bringing him dangerously near at the same time that she set herself apart.

"I've brought the books," he said. She took them from him.

"You like poetry, don't you?"

"Very much," he said.

She suddenly pitied him for no reason of the moment. And she knew that pity would wound him more than all else.

"Khwaja . . . do you think you'll ever come to England? You could get a job with one of the film companies there, couldn't you? I mean . . . it would be an experience." She was afraid of the ground she was now on.

"Oh, yes, I may, who knows?" He, for one, knew: he never would. This was just part of the game he played when he was being broad-minded. She also knew, then, that he would not.

"It's a pleasant life you lead," she said, making up for it.

He was delighted—before he had time to be suspicious.

"Oh, yes," he was playing the game for all he was worth, "I go my own way. I'm . . . a dilettante." She knew he had used the word often before.

The party, which was given in a private room of the Empress Hotel, was dull, but he enjoyed it. Especially the moment when he'd arrived with her. He drank a lot. He thought small whiskies were being served, whereas they were, in fact, doubles. Yet when she gave him a cigarette and insisted he should smoke it he looked around and said, half seriously: "God, if a Sikh sees me he'll stab me!"

At ten o'clock she wanted to go home.

"Come and dance, come and dance," he said. He was drunk and zigzagged his way across the corridor into the ballroom. She determined to go home alone, then, suddenly, followed him angrily.

The band was playing God Save the King as he clasped her around the waist.

"Stand still. Stand *still*," she said.

He couldn't hear the band, nor could he see very much. He waltzed a few steps, giggling.

Captain Moody was watching them and next day told his friend that he'd seen Mrs. Meredith dancing with an Indian to "The King," and what did he think of that?

In the tonga on the way home Khwaja suddenly kissed her full on the mouth. She pushed him away.

"Now for heaven's sake don't do that sort of thing," she said irritably, tired of him and wondering why she had endured the evening at all.

He gave her cheek a sudden little slap. It was sharp yet gentle, like the paw of a cat. He did it again, then laughed quietly and fell back asleep in his corner.

She was in bed the next morning when he came to her flat. She was about to send him away, pretending to be asleep, when she remembered the sting and caress of his hand. He had been moved to strike her when he most wanted to embrace her. This thought, she knew not why, took her into the drawing room.

She felt weary at the sight of him standing, rigid with pride and apprehension, in the doorway.

"Oh, hullo Khwaja."

"I wish to apologise." He made a faint movement, the shadow of a bow. He spoke very softly.

"Oh, Khwaja, what for?"

"For what I did last night."

"You did nothing. Absolutely nothing. Except get a bit tiddly," she added lightly.

He came into the room.

"I do not know—please believe me—I do not know what I do when I drink."

She wandered about the room drawing the shutters.

"Well, whatever you've done on other occasions, I assure you you committed no crime last night."

He stared at her, not believing her.

"Now sit down and forget all about it."

He sat down, slumped in the chair. She wished she had stayed in her bedroom. She felt she had behaved inadequately and she was beginning to feel resentment, not against him but rather against herself. This feeling always that she must attempt to expiate the guilt a little had caused her distress on more than one occasion. And on no occasion had it served its purpose.

"You are quite sure?" he said.

"That you are not offended with me."

"Quite," she said, tired of it.

"Thank you. Thank you very much."

He got up.

"I would be very glad if you and Mr. Meredith would dine in my house. I would like very much for you to meet my mother," he said.

"Thank you, Khwaja. We'd love to." This will go on for ever, she thought.

"Tonight. You will come tonight?"

"Oh, not tonight," she said hastily. "I'm . . . tired after a late night, you know."

"Please. It will not be late tonight."

"But . . . George may have some work to do. He's very busy."

"Please. It must be tonight. I won't believe . . . you will come tonight? Please."

His determination and pleading were like a quick-sand. Useless to resist. She'd seen it submerge Captain Moody instantly. He must have experienced it before.

"Very well. Thank you."

"Eight o'clock. At eight o'clock," he hurried to the door. "Thank you," he said, "we will expect you."

Khwaja's heart was heavy with gratitude and responsibility. She was a queen—he had known it the first time he met her. Of no nationality but of the gods themselves.

He allowed his pride its course, the pride he had in her and which he had denied within himself. He accepted peace of mind and a quivering new adoration.

When he got to his office he wrote a letter to his mother explaining carefully what she was to do. He stressed the fact that it was a judge and his wife, a burra sahib: "simple folk have simple values," he told the cynical dilettante as he put Rs.15 in the envelope. He added five more as an after-thought, gave the messenger a rupee for the tonga fare—his mother must have plenty of time to do her shopping—told the messenger to walk back and got on with his work. He worked like a slave all day. He prayed with his lips and with his heart that he would not have to work late. He ate no lunch—it saved money and time to go without. At tea-time an alarming thought struck him. Without hesitation he left his office, jumped on his bicycle and cycled to her flat. She was drinking her tea and was surprised to see him.

"You back again?"

He ignored this. "You do not know where I live. I will draw you a map." He took a piece of paper from his



pocket and with his fountain-pen drew a diagram, explaining the roads and land-marks.

"A little off the map," he ended, smiling nervously and preparing to leave.

"Have a cup of tea," she said. But he had to get back and he left, telling her eight o'clock.

He left the office later than he liked and cycled to a grocer's shop, where he bought a bottle of Sherry and a tin of cigarettes. He rode home as fast as the bicycle would take him.

His mother was nervous. She'd put the chutneys and sweet meats on the table; the curries had to be served hot from the kitchen. She had spent the afternoon cooking. What her son demanded her son should have. But she was nervous.

"Where's the cold meat?" he asked threateningly. She looked away. She had not been able to bring herself to buy meat. Her curries were good (and what was left over could be eaten later) but meat . . .

"Don't you understand?" he said furiously. "They are English, they *must* have meat." Then he gave in. He'd have to pretend they were invited to an Indian meal.

His sister, who was a widow, watched her children eating their food. She was unmoved. Khwaja had these moods. He also watched them. They pressed the rice together with their brown fingers, delivered it delicately to their mouths. What an endless time they were taking.

"Hurry them up," he said.

"There is time," she said, and her saffron skin flushed with annoyance.

He undressed in his small room. Here he kept his books and a photograph of Kamala. He thought how he would ask Mary for her photograph and he knew she would give it to him. He put on a pair of white trousers and tennis shoes.

The sitting-room looked in some way wrong to him. It looked bare. There was little furniture in it, it was true, but he'd cut out prints of Impressionist paintings and framed them, and of these he was proud: they proclaimed his tastes. But the room looked bare. He took a knife from the table and went out of the house. He cut an armful of flowering shrub, took it into the house and put it in a jug on the table.

He waited.

At half-past seven he went into the garden. He contemplated his bed—he slept out of doors in the hot weather. He had half a mind to bring it indoors, it looked bad. But he could hardly carry it himself.

At eight o'clock he lit a hurricane lamp, carefully adjusting the wick. They'd need to be shown the path from the road. He stood on the verandah beside it, his ears straining to hear the sound of a car.

"But my dear girl, why *will* you get yourself involved in this sort of thing?" her husband had asked.

"God knows. I can't go. I simply can't go," she'd said. "I'm dead tired," she had added.

"I certainly can't go," he said. "I shall be working half the night."

She had written the chit, absentmindedly addressed it to the office, given it to the bearer to deliver, and gone off to her bath.

Khwaja lay upon his charpoy under the stars. He lay in passionate embrace with the Sikh, whose knife was laid aside. Their murmuring became a whisper, mounted to a groan, to a frenzy of bitterness and grief.

# Incident in Iowa

by GEORGE MILLS

THE car that was called Van Buren began to jerk and shudder, arousing the few sleepers and causing the rest of us, who had remained watchful at the windows, to exchange glances.

The train was slowing down and this afternoon we had been promised exercise. A little marching, drill or P.T., the officer had said, but we must stick together, in a body, and not wander from the train.

Bob, the coloured attendant, entered and began sweeping the green, polished floor of the car. The empty cigarette packs, the candy wrappers and orange peel he sent skidding with his whisk broom; the crumbled newspapers and magazines he retrieved, patiently, and placed on the seats beside us.

"Do we get out here, Bob?" someone asked.

The negro looked moodily at the front page of a newspaper he had picked up before answering.

"I dunno, sir," he said. "Can't tell you nothin', maybe."

We had been on the train for thirty-six hours and our attitude towards him had become that of a group of children towards a popular teacher on the occasion of a school treat; polite, deferential, with just a touch of daring familiarity. He was our guide and mentor in a strange, new world. He was, I think, a little bored with us and our endless questions.

The locomotive whistle blew a deep, haunting wah-wah

and clouds of black smoke drifted out over the yellow corn. Yet another farmstead slid by, almost hidden by its surrounding cottonwood trees while, a little distance away, the inevitable red-brown barn and grey windmill stood, high and clear, on the flat, hot landscape.

The little Cockney sergeant came bustling into the car, perspiring and harassed-looking. The fantastic journey, the vast, changing horizons, the great cities we had passed through, the luxurious train, the courteous, unplaceable foreigners, white and coloured, who waited on us, were all proving a little too much for him. His world of orderly-rooms, barrack-squares, cups of tea in dingy canteens, had vanished over the skyline some fourteen days ago. The more military aspect of it would re-appear later, somewhere on the Pacific but, meanwhile, there was this Arabian Nights interim.

The sergeant made one of his last attempts to assert himself. He raised his hand and we waited in silence.

"Listen, you blokes," he said. "We're to get off at some place down the line in a few minutes."

He raised his voice above the uproar that followed. "Now listen," he shouted. "Everybody keep together and Captain Rhodes wants you to stay near the train. So don't go wandering about, anybody. And when I blow the whistle get on the train again. At once."

He repeated this with additional threats but nobody paid much attention. The sergeant's threats were old stuff and against the new background he seemed impotent, effete, possessing only nuisance value at best. It was Bob's the coloured porter's voice that carried authority now.

"An' don't any of you gentlemans hold this train back," he said, "or the engineer'll sure get mad."

In a fever of excitement we struggled into our thick

battle-dress blouses. Tins of blacking were produced from haversacks and boots hastily polished. Cap badges were rubbed with an eagerness rarely shown before and hair carefully parted and combed.

The train slowed to a crawl and quite suddenly a little prairie town appeared through the car windows. There were blocks of white, wooden houses, the avenues between them lined by huge, overhanging trees. An advertisement hoarding said "Let's go to Harold's Club. French and Italian Dinners," and behind that was a water tower, the silver coloured tank at the top bearing the town's name, Ritter, in large black letters.

With a last, grinding jar, the train stopped. Bob opened the door at the end of the car and lowered the steps. "Take your time, gentlemen," he protested as we squeezed and fought our way past him into the afternoon sunshine.

All along the line of cars men in khaki battle-dress were pouring out into the little railroad depot. Some girl clerks came out of the Western Union office to gape at the sight and were immediately whistled at. One of the brakemen, cigar in mouth, pulled out his watch.

"You boys got about fifteen minutes," he said, and pointed in the direction of Main Street, across the tracks.

We looked at the street, at the rows of parked, shining automobiles, the Neon signs blazing feebly in the sunlight, the shops and cafeterias with their gaily striped awnings, the strolling people. Then we looked at each other. Which was it to be, Main Street or a little P.T.?

The sergeant, we saw, was far away at the other end of the train in consultation with the captain and some railroad officials.

Then, as with one accord, there began a slow, seemingly casual drift across the railroad tracks. The further we got

away from the train the faster we walked, breaking into little groups of two and three as we went, all heading for the town.

Outside the depot an automobile stopped dead and, inside, faces peered at us in amazement. A fat man, in shirtsleeves and wearing a wide-brimmed hat, opened the door and hailed us.

"Where you guys from?" he called.

"Little old England," somebody shouted back with just a shade too much defiance. He grinned and gave us the V sign.

We surged up the street like an invading army. Two middle-aged women rushed out from a shop as we walked by and, from behind rimless spectacles, pale North European eyes surveyed us with frank curiosity.

On the corner outside Longo's Store a boy was selling newspapers, surrounded by youngsters of both sexes and it was by these that we were identified for a voice called "Ah, the British I presume."

They were direct, completely without shyness and wanted autographs, coins and buttons.

"Hey, don't them suits itch?"

"Gee, I like your English accent."

"You guys been in combat?"

"You guys ever see Sherlock Holmes?"

We came to the Bijou Kinema and Dall's Tavern and many dropped in here, too many for the small bar and the surprised bartender.

Into the glittering shops we tramped and out again, carrying paper bags full of peaches, apples and grapes, while some flashed cigars, shirts, cosmetics and stockings.

All along the sidewalks stood khaki figures surrounded by delighted incredulous townspeople. But time was short and we sweated urgently in the heat, trying to answer a

thousand questions, some of them about distant Pauls, Elmers and Hermans.

"Awfully good luck to you boys."

"Get one of those Japs for me."

"We're sure proud you called at Ritter."

"Yeah, that's alfalfa. It's for cattle."

"Mighty high corn growin' in this State."

"My, that's a nice looking coin. That King George Five, he was a good man."

"I guess that's someone lookin' for you."

It was the sergeant running up the street, blowing his whistle and embarrassing us all. Up at the depot the locomotive was sounding angry, fearful blasts that echoed all over the town.

Good-bye now. We hurried back to the train, the people walking along with us on all sides, naively pleased. No comment was coming from the sergeant and it seemed that authority had winked at the escapade.

From the car windows we waved and shook hands. A group of children stuck imaginary monocles in their eyes and called out "I siy, old fruit, I siy, old fruit!" The train began its alarming pulls and jerks, the lovely tree-lined avenues, the small, tidy lawns, the white wooden houses with, here and there, an ornamental star hanging at a window to indicate an absent son or husband, went gliding by and as suddenly as it had appeared Ritter was gone.

Bob came in and looked despondently at the shirts, the cigars and the souvenirs. He listened in silence to our adventures in what was, to him, just another halt on a five days journey and at the railroad edge the sunflowers began to race past as we hastened away across the great prairie.

# Knight Errant

by ARTHUR CALDER-MARSHALL

PERCIVAL WILLIAMS was walking in the gardens of the Kala Magdan, that monstrous fortress which the Turks, when masters of Belgrade, built at the confluence of the Sava and the Danube. But the sunshine, the flowers, the long view over the plain to Zemun and especially the parade of elegant girls did not gladden his heart. It only made him more depressed and conscious of his army number. "My God," he thought, "I wish I wasn't a ruddy private. I wish I didn't serve in a grocery store back home. I wish I had oodles of dough and could marry a smasher."

The girl whom he had been following turned round and smiled. She smiled and Percival's heart began to pound. He looked round to see if there was a man behind him at whom she might have smiled. But there was no one.

Perhaps she didn't smile after all. It was the shadow of a tree, the illusion of light. But there was no tree, no passing clouds.

The girl went over to a low wall and stood looking out across the Sava, black hair, arched nose and pear-shaped breast outlined against the sky. Again she threw a sidelong glance and this time there was no possible doubt.

Redfaced, Percival went over and leaned on the wall not far from her. She turned to him and showing her



pearly teeth in a dazzling smile, said. "Ze view, it is loveful, no?"

She talked English!

Percival came closer. His inhibitions were relaxed. He began to talk, about Belgrade, about being in the Army, about the old country. And she! she was so sympathetic! She never said a word. She just smiled and looked at him. And though Percival was not a vain sort of cuss, he couldn't help seeing that she had fallen for him in a very big way. He had read in novelettes about love at first sight, but here it was in real life.

"I say," he said, "can't I . . . I mean, can't we sometime . . . I'm on guard duty to-night . . . but what about to-morrow evening?"

"No, Percee, may I call you Percee, yes? Not in public we cannot meet." She looked round, as if she was afraid. "It is dangersome. You are English . . . ah, how I love you English, you do not know . . . but you cannot think what it is like here in Belgrade since these wild men came from the woods, these Montenegrins."

"But, Vera, I must meet you again," he said. "I must, please."

"I tell you," she said, "you come to my house . . . I give the address . . . at seven o'clock, yes, you come?"

Percy stammered his thanks and Vera put her hand on his arm. "Now I must go," she said, "and please, please do not follow me. OZNA . . . the secret police . . . they are everywhere."

Next evening, Percy, still almost delirious with unexpected happiness, shone his boots, slicked back his hair, polished his brasses and went to the address which the girl had given him.

It was a large, modern apartment house, spattered with

bullet-holes, but obviously very high-class. As he went up the stairs, Percy felt frightened. What chance had he with a rich girl like Vera?

Even as he rang the bell, he hoped that he had made some mistake about the address so that the adventure could end there, untouched by the frustration of reality. But immediately there was the sound of footsteps on a parquet floor and the door was opened by Vera herself.

Her hair had been newly waved. Her dress, a simple but expensive sports tunic, her stockings and her shoes were in perfect taste. She looked ravishing, but even more unattainable than the day before.

But her welcome was so simple, her pleasure so plain that as he entered, all fears and doubts about the future vanished in the excitement of the present.

The apartment was vast, one great room leading into another; and each was furnished in a different mood of luxury, a bit showy perhaps but certainly expensive.

Percy could see nowhere to put his forage cap and so he tucked it under his shoulder-strap. But he immediately regretted it, because he could see it out of the corner of his eye and it was like a third person, looking over his shoulder, a cynic whispering, "You fraud, this is way above your class and you'll never get away with it."

"I am so sorry," Vera said, "I cannot entertain you as I would like. But we have nothing now, you see. The life is so poor here." She went over to a cabinet. "What you drink? Whiskey, gin, brandy or champagne?"

"You haven't any beer?" Percy asked.

"Alas!" she said, "But I think you take whiskey."

"Just a nip, then."

Vera's idea of a nip was generous. She poured half a tumbler, but as she poured the same for herself, Percy could not protest.

She raised her glass. "Zivio!" she said, "Long live the Anglo-Americans!"

After the first drink, things became hazy. Waking in the darkness on his canvas bed, all he could recollect was that she kissed him not as Cathy in Beckenham or Esther, the Jewish ATS girl in Ismailia, or fat Aggie in Taranto, but with a long exploring passion entirely new to him. Then her parents came in and were not angry. They gave him cold meats, goat's milk cheese and a Serbian dish which was like savoury Cornish cream; and they drank *rakeya*, which Vera's father said was the real *rakeya* from Uzice. He remembered the old man leaning forward, raising his glass. He was seeing double like in music hall jokes and there were two old men leaning forward raising two glasses in two right hands. His brain was quite clear and it was like a scientific experiment in vision and the old man said, "X" meaning no heeltaps and they all drank their *rakeyas* in one gulp and then he was back in the Union, lying on his bed with his boots on, feeling very cold in the darkness.

Next morning he reported sick and he was sick literally. But he was even sicker in his heart, because he had got drunk and disgraced himself in the eyes of the most wonderful girl in the world and her parents. They had seen him as the beast he was and he could never enter their house again.

He hid his face in the kitbag which he used as a pillow and groaned, because he was a lowdown no-good type who didn't know how to behave decently among decent people and there was a little man sitting on his brain tapping the inside of his skull with a hammer. He lay there for hours and from the street outside came the noise of cars hooting at the crossroads three times for left and twice

for right and once for straight on and in the passage was the noise of soldiers walking up and down, their iron heels clicking on the tiles.

Then the footsteps came to his door and the door opened and he raised his head from the kitbag.

It was Smithy and he had a letter in his hand. "Billy doo, Perce!" He said. "*She* brought it."

Percy took the envelope, but he didn't open it. He knew what would be in it.

"She's a smasher all right," Smithy said. "But you take it from me. You marry her and she'll spend the whole week's wages in the beauty parlour."

"Never you fear," Percy said.

When Smithy went out, Percy opened the thick deckle-edged envelope, stamped with a V and spread out the letter. It was on paper to match and scented; must have cost a packet. "Darling," he read, "what a lovely evening!"

He sat up. His hangover had gone. He read the letter through. There was not a mention of bad behaviour or annoyance. It was a wonderful letter, filled with a tenderness that was if anything embellished by the strangeness of its idiom. And it ended, "Remember that we expect you this evening at the same o'clock. Love Vera."

So he had behaved like a gentleman after all and she was not angry. The billy doo was signed Love Vera. A girl does not sign Love Vera unless she is in love and wants to be loved in return.

He got up from the bed. The sun was shouting in the blue sky. A boy and girl were walking down the street, hand in hand, swinging their arms. They thought they were in love, perhaps, believed they knew what love was. As if anyone on earth had ever known the deep love he and Vera shared!

He rang the bell, but this time there were no immediate footsteps, and when they came, they were slower, heavier, older. It was Vera's mother. "You come in, please," she said, and as soon as he entered, she closed and bolted the door.

"How is Vera?" he asked.

The old woman stood, clasping and unclasping her hands. "Our friend, Mrs. Petrovich," she said, "she sees Vera when she comes out of the Union and two men from the OZNA they go behind and then outside the University they stop her and they speak and they take her away." She put her handkerchief to her eyes. "My little Vera," she says, "shall I ever see her again?"

Vera's father came out of the next room and put his arm round his wife and gently led her away. "I am sorry, Mr. Williams," he said, "we have only Vera."

They went through the long rooms to the end and there they sat in the dim light silent, and to Percy it seemed accusing. For, after all, if she had never come to the Union to give him that tender letter, she would be here now. It was their love, their tragic, wonderful love which had brought her to this danger.

Vera's father got up and started to walk up and down the room, biting the end of his moustache. The old lady sat on the sofa, rocking slowly from side to side. "It's my fault," said Percy. "I shall never forgive myself. But what can we do now? What can *I* do?"

Vera's father stood still. "Are you blind, you Anglo-Americans?" he asked. "Do you not see that we are sitting on top of the Bolsheviki terroristic boiler? We have no liberty no longer in our beloved Serbia. It is worse now . . . yes, listen, it is worse than it was under the Nazis. And yet you Anglo-Americans stand by and will not intervene."

All the stories which he had heard from the boys came flooding over Percy, the midnight arrests, the questionings and the imprisonments without trial. "I wonder," he said, "if they let her go . . . then supposing . . . I mean if she married an Englishman . . . then they couldn't touch her."

Vera's mother looked up. "She will not come back, never," she said. "Oh, I know it. My little Vera! My poor little Vera!" Her voice rose to a high wail and then she broke down and began sobbing again, as before but louder.

Percy got up and went to Vera's father. "You may think this awful cheek, sir," he said. "You see I've got no money. I'm just a grocer's assistant in Civvy Street. It's a steady job, mind, but there's not much dough in it. And I was afraid . . . well, I can't give Vera the luxuries she's used to. . . ." Vera's father stopped biting the end of his moustache. "I mean I love her, sir, and I'd give my life for her."

Vera's father took hold of his arm. "Young man," he said, deeply moved. "Important in life is not money, is not power. But Love, Love is important." He dropped his hand. "And life, too!" He sighed and turned away.

Percy was filled with shame to have spoken of love and marriage, when it was not Vera's happiness, but her very existence, which was at stake. "I'm sorry," he said, "I oughtn't to have spoken."

Vera's father turned again. "If Vera returns," he said, "you see, here in Serbia we have the custom of giving a *dot* . . . how do you say, dowry, yes? . . . to our daughters when they have espousals. I am no longer very rich man. But I am not very poor man, not yet. That is why they hate me, these Partisans . . . I tell you, they say I am

collaborator, me! But if my little Vera loves you, do not worry, young man. There will be money."

At that moment, there came a ringing at the bell and a beating on the door.

"The OZNA!" shrieked Vera's mother and the old man stood stock still, clenching and unclenching his fists.

"You leave it to me," said Percy, "they won't dare do nothing with a British Tommy around. The bastards, I'd like to see 'em try." He strode through the great rooms, his boots hammering reassurance on the parquet floor. His fist was clenched ready to let fly. He'd open the door with his left hand.

He pulled back the bolts and threw open the door and waited ready to smother their guns.

"Vera!" he said, "Vera, my darling," and he took her in his arms, laughing and crying with relief.

When Percy made up his mind to do anything, he drew on unsuspected resources of doggedness and will-power. He went back to the Union and told all the boys. Then he saw his commanding officer, who tried to pull the old line of putting things through official channels. But that wasn't good enough for Percy. This was a matter of life and death. Once she had escaped from the clutches of secret police. The next time she might not be so lucky. Vera herself admitted that even when they were married, she would not be safe until she was out of the country; a stray shot, a street accident, or a mysterious disappearance with no trace left, anything might be possible.

The ten days' struggle which culminated in his getting permission to marry Vera (a record in the Mediterranean Theatre) was the peak point in Percy's life. The idealism which had never been fully evoked during the long trek from El Alamein to Italy flowered in the rescue of this

young and lovely girl from forces which even her father was forced to admit were darker and more vicious than Nazism. "I must say," said his commanding officer, when the permission came through, "I must say, Williams, you've behaved not so much like a private as a Knight Errant."

Vera's father made over to her all his foreign investments to the value of over one hundred and sixty thousand pounds, together with such jewellery and precious stones as she could smuggle through the customs.

When she reached London, she paid a visit to Percy's parents in Beckenham, but refused to stay with them because she did not want to put them out. She is a girl of great loyalty and is moving heaven and earth to get her parents out of Yugoslavia, before the evidence of collaboration is complete; and she would not think of letting Percy know that she was never arrested by the Secret Police, even when the divorce has been made absolute. After all, she is British, now.



# Lieutenant Li

by JOHN SILBY

THE doctor said his name was Li Dven Yu, but we always called him Li; he was brought into the officers' ward a day or two after the rest of us, since the hospital staff thought he was a private when the ambulance brought him from the river-boat. The first we heard of him was when Matron came hopping into the ward to ask if any of us could read Chinese (Matron had a badly poisoned foot which was bandaged and protected by a wire splint, so she had to hop wherever she went). She had a piece of stout cardboard with her, covered with Chinese characters, written and printed. Li had given her this card, showing by signs that it was important, but since none of the Chinese patients could speak English she had to ask us if we could translate it for her. We couldn't, so she took it into the next ward, to ask the British soldiers and N.C.O.s. Among them was a White Russian who had come from Hong-Kong to join the British forces. He had been shot through the shoulder by an anti-tank rifle, and he could speak Chinese, Japanese, and English, as well as Russian. He recognised the card at once; it was an officer's Identity Card. So they discovered that he was an officer, and that his name was Li.

They took him out of the long basha, the wicker, mud, and thatched shed put up for the Chinese patients, and brought him into the bungalow where the English soldiers and officers were. It was a wooden bungalow with two

stories and a narrow, winding stair, up and down which the stretchers had to be carried to the operating theatre. It was steel-framed to withstand earthquakes, and the ceilings were covered with bulging cloth and cobwebs. Originally, it had belonged to the doctor of the tea-garden on which it was situated.

They put him on the rope bed next to mine, between me and the glass doors opening on to the verandah, which looked out on to the jungly landscape of Assam. He was a tough-looking Cantonese, with his hair clipped short round his bullet head. There was something badly wrong with his leg.

He pulled a face as they tipped him off the stretcher on to the bed, but lay quietly after that. I looked at him and grinned, and he grinned back, creasing up all his face around his broad mouth. It was a yellow face, but we did not notice how worn because everybody was like that.

We couldn't talk, but the next day he pulled out a notebook, and held up his fingers, one after another. He wanted me to tell him the English names for numbers, and wrote them down in Chinese characters. He learnt the names of one or two things in the room, and grinned when we corrected his pronunciation. His chief trouble then was with the Indian orderlies who looked after us; they had no training and knew no English, and most of them were Madrassis and knew very little Urdu either. Even second-Lieutenant Manners, who had commanded a company of Sikhs until a bomb landed within five yards of him on the Prome road, couldn't abuse them to his satisfaction, and once when an orderly spilt scalding porridge on his chest, was reduced to throwing the remains of it over the orderly.

Li made little drawings on a piece of paper torn from

his notebook of a bedpan and a urinal, to which he pointed whenever he wanted the articles concerned. He learnt to say "pani," and "char," and probably thought they were English words. But the nearest he could get to "orderly" was "toli".

"Toli, toli," he used to call, in a shrill, exasperated voice. The attention was bad, for the nurses were over-worked and had no time to see the Indian staff did their job; it was often very difficult to get an orderly when you wanted one.

Most of the time he was very quiet, lying there. Every day the nurse came and dressed his leg, and every day the doctor came to see him. He had less appetite now, which did not surprise us, for the tinned food was murderously cooked. He no longer asked the English names of things, but just lay quietly in his bed.

One day several doctors came to see him, a big, fair major, who was surgical specialist, and several Indians. The English orderly in charge of the ward brought in a strange mechanical splint. The doctors placed it on Li's bed and put his leg into it, carefully, resting it on bandages stretched across between the frames. Above was a pulley wheel, and they fastened sticky plaster to Li's foot, tying it to a rope which ran over the pulley and hung down, weighted by a couple of bricks. They thought Li's leg might be fractured, they said, and they wanted to pull it into place.

The worst of it was, he couldn't tell them when they hurt him, or how. He could only grate his teeth and make a shrill, hurt noise. During the evening, the apparatus was giving him a lot of pain.

"Toli, toli," he called.

At length the orderly came; an Indian who seemed to have come straight from the jungle. Li pointed to the

rope, and the Indian lifted the bricks up and put them on the bed. After that Li was quiet.

Next day the doctor came, and when he saw the bricks on the bed he was annoyed, and replaced them as before. Often Li's face was twisted with pain, and his lips drawn back off his blunt teeth. The orderlies neglected him, because he couldn't talk, and did not wash him properly. He grew irritable, and waved his food away without touching it. He hated milk in his tea, and used to pour it all out on the floor. We tried to make the orderlies understand what he wanted, but they took very little notice.

He seemed shut off in a room of his own, cut off by his language so that no-one could get in to help him. They tried putting Chinese soldiers in the ward, but it was no use; they spoke another dialect.

He had grown terribly thin. his legs were like bean-sticks, except where his left knee was puffed up, and the skin drawn tight over the inflammation. He had a belt round his waist, which he would not let them take off; it had money in it. His tummy had shrunk so much that the belt stood out loosely from the skin, though drawn as tight as it would go. All his ribs showed, and his cheeks had fallen in, and were losing even their yellow colour.

One day an old Chinese carpenter came; he worked on a tea-garden nearby, and the hospital had borrowed him to fix up the wires from which our mosquito-curtain hung, since they had fallen down that morning. He could talk Li's language, and asked if there was anything he wanted.

What Li wanted was some China tea.

The next day the carpenter came back with a packet, and after that Li had a pot of hot water brought him at mealtimes, so that he could make tea as he liked.

A little while after this, the doctors took Li out of his uncomfortable splint; it hadn't done him any good, and

now they thought his leg might not be fractured after all.

"He wouldn't get attention like this in his own army," one of them said.

There were no X-rays in the hospital, which had been hurriedly established. The heavy rains had washed away the railway and made the river unnavigable, so Li could not be sent back for better treatment. For this reason, too, our rations grew very short.

The rains had made a big pool in the waste ground between the bungalow and the tea-gardens, and in the evenings the rooms were full of mosquitos, beetles, and stink-bugs, which made a horrible smell when you squashed them. We had to eat our dinner inside our nets, but even then they crawled in and plagued us. It was in the evening interval, when the day nurses had gone off duty and the night sisters had not begun, when the orderlies were left in charge, that things were worst. I had malaria then, and usually slept in the early evening. I would wake up, sticky and confused, thinking it was morning, until Manners told me it was only eight o'clock. I hated the night; there was only one fan, and that wouldn't work. The soldiers in the next ward used to sing, and Manners used to go in and teach them bawdy songs. They used to finish every evening singing "The Red Flag." Bits of song would mix themselves up with my malaria dreams, and the ideas I got in the dreams mixed themselves up with my thoughts when I awake.

One day a Chinese doctor visited the hospital. He was a colonel, in charge of all the Chinese medical services in India. He spoke English beautifully, and spoke to Li in his own dialect, asking if he wanted anything.

Li said he wanted some pay.

The colonel promised he should have some, and asked

Li if he liked the English food he was getting, or whether he would rather have rice, curry, or other Indian dishes; he said no, he would rather have English food, which surprised us, because he ate so little.

But a day or two after this, Li saw some green figs in a basket on the verandah, brought up for the kitchen. He pointed to them, and when they were brought he ate so many we thought he would be down with dysentery, or near it. After that, the doctors ordered him a fruit diet, which he usually ate.

One day the carpenter came back to the hospital, with all the Chinese artisans from the neighbouring tea-gardens. Each brought Li a present; a bottle of boiled sweets, a tin of biscuits, a packet of tea. On these he fed himself, mostly. He never ate his ordinary rations, which the orderly gave to Lieutenant Manners and his neighbour, a captain; both ravenously hungry now they were beginning to walk and gain strength.

A new doctor came, and looked at Li's leg. It was swollen, worse than before, an unpleasantness with a jelly look filled the cuts and deep gashes below the knee. A smell came off him like strong meat.

The new doctor worked hard, and we all liked him. He had grey hair and a Scots accent, and often in the evenings I would wake out of a malaria dream and see him standing by Li's bed.

One day, when Li's wounds were being dressed, they began to bleed. They bled badly, and after that the doctor told the nurses to look at him every half-hour in case they bled again. But the nurses were tired and overworked, for several of them were absent with malaria; and they did not look as often as they should.

There were no more of those fits of pain, now, when Li drew back his lips and creased his face, or made a shrill

noise like a fly in a web. He just lay quietly, not eating, seldom even drinking tea.

One day they gave him an enema, and hung sheets round him, from the wires which supported the mosquito curtains at night. When it was over they left the sheets hanging there.

My malaria was worse, and I was sleepy and muddled, but often I woke and saw the nurse, or the orderly in the evenings, looking at Li behind his screens; more than ever now he seemed shut off in a white room of his own, alone with weakness and discomfort, and vague snatches of memory; the brown thatch huts in the Cantonese paddy fields, the coolies in their stiff, straw hats with huge brims, bearing a yoke across their shoulders. With the tarmac of the Burmese road, stretching through flat, yellow fields, dotted with islets of jungle, by which the bombs which had caught him threw up rolling towers of dust, as the shrill propellers were heard above the bursts.

Next day I slept most of the time, or lay letting my thoughts come and go as they would, like cars at Piccadilly Circus. I couldn't collect them, or make them come or go except as they wanted. There were no policemen.

In the evening I slept after tea, though once or twice I heard the soldiers singing in the next ward. They were singing "The Farmer's Boy."

" Oh Yestereve the sun went down  
Behind yon dreary moor "

they sang. And they ended on a long note:

" To be a Varmer's Boy, oy, oy,  
To be a Varmer's Boy."

Then I went sound asleep, and woke up as men were walking through the ward, I suppose getting their dinner.

I saw someone looking through my mosquito curtain, and saw it was Manners, with his sharp features and foxy hair.

"Awake?" he asked.

"What time is it?" I said.

"About eight o'clock."

This surprised me; I thought it was about midnight.

Manners spoke again.

"The Chinaman's gone off," he said.

"What? When?"

"About an hour ago; the orderly looked through the curtains, and there he was, dead."

Just then a sepoy brought our dinner, and there was no more talking till we had eaten it, as much as we could. Malaria had taken away all my appetite, so I pushed the plates on to the table outside my mosquito-net.

"Didn't he make any noise or anything?" I asked.

"No; no-one knew he'd gone till the orderly looked round the curtains to see if he was alright."

"I suppose it's a good thing; if they'd cut his leg off, he'd have been no use, in his own country."

I could hear Manner's spoon clicking on his tin plate as he replied.

"They couldn't, anyway," he said. "He was too weak."

"I hope they're going to bury him pretty soon," said the Captain, "it won't do if they leave him here all night, in this weather."

They took him away early the next morning; when the orderly lifted up my mosquito-net, I saw the curtain had gone.

Later, we heard they had some difficulty, because the pamphlet contains no instructions for burying a Chinese. But in the end the padre read the shorter service, and they covered him with a Union Jack, just as though he had been an Englishman.



# Victory Dance

by ALAN WYKES

I LEANED out of the window, feeling the good cool rainy air after the heat of the room. Behind me Fred was tinkling away on the piano, no tune, just going to town. Now and again Mike and Smudger and Rhino would join in with him. The violin sounded vibrant and sick, the accordion wheezy and flat. The drum thudded in the background, vibrating the corner of the poster that was fastened to the wall beside the window: **DON'T FRATERNISE: WE MUST TEACH THE GERMANS A LESSON** in yellow letters on red paper. Every time Rhino pressed the pedal the corner of the paper lifted and fell with a furious rustling. Behind the music and the rustling I could hear the boys getting warmed up, the ATS giggling. Without turning round I knew what the room looked like: hazy and blue with smoke beneath the fancy chandelier; the ATS thrusting their bodies against their partners' as they shuffled round and round; the bar in the far corner with Greta, the German girl who waited on us standing blond and still, watching. I didn't turn round. I was supposed to be MC-ing the dance, but it hadn't warmed up yet and I was browned off with it. It was just the same as any other dance, except in name.

The street was cool and empty after the rain, with light flicking back from a puddle outside the window. Beyond the orderly houses of the German village the church's shell-pierced spire lifted to the deepening sky. One of our lads

walked out of HQ. a few doors up and went on down the road. I thought I heard a faint derisive laugh muted by a closed window, a drawn curtain. He disappeared and the street was empty and silent again.

The music stopped and only the voices behind me were imprinted on the silence. Fred came and stood beside me. "Looking for a bit of frat?"

"A breath of air," I said. "It's warm".

"I'll get you a drink."

I said not to bother, but he went.

The little girl stood before me. I did not see her coming but she was there, standing with her hands behind her back. She was about six and had pale yellow, almost white hair that was plaited and bound round her head like a coronet. She had wide grey eyes and the corners of her mouth were lifted in a smile. She was beautiful with the enchanted innocence of all children. She watched me from the safety of two yards' distance, wondering what I was going to do. I looked up and down and saw the empty street and looked back at her and smiled.

"What's your name?"

She shook her head and I said it again, pointing at her: "Name? Your name?" She didn't understand the words but she knew what I was getting at.

"Hilde," she said.

I thought of Sylvia, dark vivacious and delightful. Just about now Joan would be putting her to bed. Say your prayers and don't forget to ask God to bring Daddy back to us soon.

Fred brought the schnapps and put it on the sill beside me. He saw the child.

"At it again! You want to mind somebody doesn't walk down the road and catch you," he said. "In broad daylight, too. Well, almost."

"Ah, nuts," I said. "Get me some biscuits. The sweet ones."

He brought the biscuits and I tore the paper and held one out to the child. She came just near enough to take it, then retreated again across the wide pavement from which the tables and the bright umbrellas had been removed. As she ate the biscuit she smiled at me with her eyes. I knew I was going to give her more and she knew it too. I laughed and she echoed the sound as I handed her the remaining biscuits. She said something I did not understand and ran off up the street, her quick legs hovering like butterflies over the wet road. I drank the schnapps because my throat was dry and went and stood by Fred at the piano. His fingers were dancing and smoke drifted across his face from the cigarette at his lips' corner. Beyond the gyrating couples I could see Greta behind the bar, wiping glasses and smiling, smiling at the secret thoughts in her mind.

The tune finished and Fred stood up and drank the beer that was on the piano. Mike bedded his violin in its purple plush and the couples wandered over to the settees. Their speech and laughter tinkled like a thin glass barrier near-shattered by the echoes of despair.

"Not much of a show," Mike said.

Then I turned to the window and there was Hilde's small face with its enigmatic smile looking in at me. But this time the smile was multiplied and comprehensive in the faces of six or seven other older children who were all crowding round the opened window, watching us.

"Oh lord," I said. "She's brought a crowd of other kids."

Rhino dusted the cymbal with the brushes. "What do you expect if you stand there feeding her biscuits?"

"We'll have the RP's and the duty officer and God knows who else along in a minute," Smudger said. He eased

himself into the accordion straps. "Get rid of them, for God's sake."

I went to the window. I did not speak to the children. I pulled down the window and felt cruel. Not waiting to see if they went away I turned and shouted:

"Partners for a quick-step!"

The band quivered into "I Can't Give You Anything But Love."

I forced myself not to look at the window, sat down and somebody brought me another schnapps. The room was getting very hot. The fellows and the ATS had their blouses off now and the dance was going well. The drink was making them almost enjoy it. I saw two couples dance off the floor surreptitiously, past the bar and Greta's amused smile with its distant secrecy, disappear into the garden. The tune finished on brief impatient clapping. "Number eight," Fred said through his cigarette smoke, his heel tapping the floor. The dancers were moving again under the hot white light. Fred would keep it going now; only two minutes between each three-tune dance. I turned to the window.

Outside, the children were still there. They had given up the idea of getting any more biscuits. Instead, with the amusing mimicry of their years, they were in couples, holding each other and moving gravely round the wide pavement in imitation of the men and girls inside the room. Hilde was held tightly by a fat little boy in a blue linen suit who pushed her in response to his own awkward movements. The children had the droll, unsmiling appearance of marionettes controlled by a clumsy hand. I watched them and wondered how long it would be before someone came and turned them away.

Then I saw two German boys coming along the road. They were about eighteen, slim and erect, and each had

a girl on his arm. From some distance away they saw the children and laughed and gesticulated towards them. Then they crossed the road. For a few moments they looked in at the window and at the children, puzzled and amused. I saw them smile and speak and in a moment they were dancing with the children on the pavement. When the music stopped they did not go away, they just stopped in mid-dance, waiting for the music to continue.

I nudged Fred and pointed. The lads and the ATS didn't take any notice, but I could see they felt awkward. All chose seats with their backs to the windows, or became superlatively interested in each other's conversation.

"What can *I* do?" Fred asked me. "It's their street. You can't stop them dancing in it. Or can you?"

I didn't know. Anyway it was too late. When I looked again I saw that the noise of their laughter and talking had opened the doors of the houses and brought people out. There were about a dozen couples on the pavement. And all along the street heads were thrust out of the windows.

The band started playing again, a strident melody that began again to flutter the poster on the wall beside me. The boys were loud with laughter now. They moved with quick exaggerated movements as they began to dance again and the ATS' cheeks were flushed with wine and dancing.

Outside, like a reflection, the children and the people danced under the dusk and the promise of the first pale stars. They whirled and twisted with their dresses swirling and their hair flying and snatches of song on their lips. Looking from the cool street and my enemies' unbidden merriment back to the hot room in which I was imprisoned with my comrades and the violent throb of the music it seemed to me that for a moment the dancers were happy.

It seemed also as if only the glass of the window divided us, each enemy, one from the other.

# The Green Madness

by J. T. BROCKWAY

It began in Assam. The heat, the damp, and the disappointment started it. Always I was fighting a lost battle, with each day ending in exhaustion, lying prostrate under the mosquito net, dreaming of a breath of cool, dry air, and hating, hating, hating. A virulent mental delirium not only on the camp-bed at night, but all day long under the unrelenting sun, beneath the blue mountains wreathed with the monsoon cloud, and along the red dust pathways through the tea-gardens—constant delirium, that was my condition. In the Mess at night I used to soak at the gin and whiskey, but it was only a passing from one form of perdition to another. The mornings would start with hope, cold and promising; but, by breakfast, the terrible, inescapable curse was on me again. All the past, which had seemed until now concrete and indestructible, a sure anchor, dissolved about me; and myself, I could feel, dissolving with it. Dissolving, dissolving . . . each day one more trace of identity gone, and the now haphazard mess that had once been myself and had seemed a coherent whole, swirling and floundering, barely recognisable. I struggled and protested, made some attempt to free myself, even tried, in my innocence, to talk of it to others, yet when I did, strangely enough, my presence didn't startle, and I could hear my own voice, monotonous, steady, ordinary, betraying no suspicion of the horrifying process going on within me during those stifling months. It was incommunicable, I suppose. I

could think of only one certain way of making it known to the outside world—that was to take out my pistol and put a clean, neat bullet through my head. But I had disintegrated far enough to be incapable of so clear-cut, so personal, an act. No. I was in the whirlpool and there was no escaping. Realise that, I said to myself, realise it, accept it, and wait. But it didn't work; there was still too much consciousness left in me of what I had been, a recognisable, if illogical, entity; and so I fought and railed and hoped.

The station we were occupying there was twenty miles from the railhead, over a bund road and ferry. The railhead town provided no escape, no anchorage. A forlorn little huddle of tin huts and sordid shops, with a European club, cheerful as a morgue, and its pathetic, little cinema (of corrugated-iron) standing at the edge of the town where the fields began. But twenty miles up the road, at the aerodrome, trapped in that sweltering, green cage of jungle, that each day seemed to encroach a step further, steadily, surely, closing in around you, with the impassable blue mountains to the north and west of you, and the endless plain of rice-field, bamboo thicket, and swamp to the south and east of you, you looked upon the town down there as a haven of refuge, a certain escape. Damnable, hateful mirage. I soon learnt that going down there was useless. But in any case, I was soon no longer free to choose, for my tormentor had its hand on me and gripped me ever tighter and tighter in its green, twining, irresistible fingers. I was never to comprehend it, never to come to grips with it, never to see it as a clear image, the image of my enemy, my conqueror, clear and whole in my mind. But its existence and its power over me was a reality, a persistent, insidious, overmastering presence that never left me in peace.

Standing in the middle of the airfield, across the runway (even the airfield was conditioned by it, was strange and unfamiliar, reminding me of none I had known before), I was oppressed by it, lurking in the still, flat void, whose vastness slid away in sad perspectives all around me; in the very minuteness of the small, brown figures of the coolies, working away at the far end of the runway, the high, thin babble of their voices and the clatter of their shovels silenced by distance. . . . Or, in a clearing, under the heavy, spreading trees, the hanging feathers of bamboo, where the mechanics had set up their tent and worked in the shade, the oil from the aircraft engines mixed into the sweat that ran down their naked, sun-scorched bodies; here, too, it would make itself felt, would come with a great gust of heat from the fields, staying their busy hands and stilling the homely sound of their rough voices; imposing on us all a hot, oppressive silence, cut through by the high piping of a hidden bird. Yes, the birds, too, were a part of it all; innumerable varieties strange and savagely coloured, shrilling at us from their hiding places in the thick bamboo, brain fever birds . . . . And at night, the insect horde, the countless, inhuman hosts, whipped all day long into a frenzy by the cigales' pitiless lash, would commence their night-long attack on our sun-shrivelled nerves. . . . Or, along a pathway, one of those trailing red-dust tracks that wind themselves through the green, encroaching foliage, closing in behind you as you go, now suddenly breaking away to reveal the line of the far-off mountains, blue and inaccessible in the distance, there in the green, dusty stillness, it would descend and threaten me, remind me that there was no escape from the claims of the jungle. Even the solid, white-washed walls of the Mess bungalow could not keep it out. There it would suddenly reveal itself, lurking in



the dulled, protruding eyes of the boy who pulled the punkah to and fro, or in the black hand of the waiter on my plate during dinner.

But I made fitful efforts to escape. There was no conscious decision, no thought-out programme of regeneration. I was long past that sort of effort. But I tumbled on to the backs of gharries and crowded into the station-wagon along with other bodies to take part in the swimming, tennis, and shooting parties devised by those who, groping, had sensed that sanity lay in routine.

One day, in the river, I thought for a moment I had found myself again. After swimming and racing down in the current by the far bank, I secured a footing on the soft, mud-covered rocks of the river bed and gazed up the valley. In the foreground a large birch tree hung over the green cleft, flashing in the sun, and beyond, the mountains clothed in a thick fur of round, green trees, glistened and sparkled, shaped like a woman's thighs, a bowl, whose depths called you and would gently receive you. Transcending all, the sky mountains of cloud, folding and reforming, undulating and regrouping, with majestic slow movements that belonged to another world, a wider world, in which our puny orb twisted and tossed unnoticed. But the moment passed, and I was sick of the river with its slimy rocks and brackish water in the pools, sick of the physical motions of swimming, sick of the others' naked, gesticulating bodies, and their raucous, healthy shouting. The next moment I was on the bank, feverishly drying myself down, anxious only to get away, to escape from escape, no matter where. And because the deep bowl of the mountains, the birch tree, and the clouds, had reminded me, had flashed for a moment through my every nerve a sensation of the comprehensible past, and thereby,

for as short a space, had seemed to reconstitute me, wholly and recognisable, only the next moment to leave me floundering again, I hated the scene; and I never returned to it during the rest of my imprisonment up there.

\* \* \* \*

It was not only myself that was becoming strange and unfamiliar to me. The others, too, about me, the men with whom I dwelt, ate, talked and flew, they, too, had long ago lost their reality. That began with forgetting their names. Many a time, huddled in a chair in the Mess, I would look across to one who was writing, or drinking, or telling a story, or just gazing—as we all so often gazed, our eyes fixed on nullity, behind them the mind wrestling with a dark, shapeless, nameless nothing—and as I gazed at the fellow, it would suddenly occur to me that I couldn't remember his name—I *couldn't remember his name*. His basha was next to mine, we talked through the bamboo wall each morning as we shaved, we sat at the same, the only, table in the Mess, we flew together in the same flight, the same formation, had done for the last four months, *but*, I could not remember his name. And, frantic, my eyes would search him for a recognition mark, whilst my mind stumbled through all the names of the pilots on the Flight notice board, until ultimately it came across the one that fitted his face. It was a horrifying experience that came back time after time, until I used to be reduced to the pathetic absurdity of the formula, I am I, J. T. B., and he is so-and-so, and next to him is what's-his-name, and so on. But it went much further than a mere

forgetting of names. The lives and the everyday activities of my comrades soon began to lose all sense and meaning. It was impossible to see the sense in what they were doing. That bunch there in the corner of the bar, crouched around a low table crowded with bottles, glasses, and overflowing ash-trays, a mad, chattering, howling group, now breaking out into song, heads thrown back in chorus, now huddled, heads together, minds savouring each lewd and lovely sensation the particular story being told had to offer, the scene wreathed in blue tobacco smoke, whirling and swirling tortuously under the punkah, under the yellow lamps. Or the haphazard bodies sprawling in the basha over the camp-beds, charpoys, or lolling in improvised bamboo chairs, during afternoons of incessant rain, when the monsoon stopped all flying, all activity of any kind, but this. Lying there, assembled ostensibly to hear the tinny gramophone's effusion of cheap tunes, but, if the truth were known, driven there for refuge from the unbearable solitude of their bashas, by the sinister, insistent dripping of the rain, drumming out its message of despair.

It seemed, in those days, as though everything happened by accident. The idea of purposeful activity, of a patterned existence had become obliterated; the chain of cause and effect snapped, its links fallen into rust. People were here, people were there; they did this, they did that; or they did nothing at all but wait for the days, the hours to pass. But whatever happened seemed to happen purely by chance, fortuitously, spasmodically; without design, sequence, or purpose. The sense had gone out of things . . . And although I look back now on those forlorn little groups of men, as though I stood outside them, I know that I was one amongst them; although caught in my own private whirlpool, I was still in the same tumultuous river that swept us all along. My head was thrown back in the roaring

chorus, my head bent forward to the lewd story, my head lolling in the bamboo chair, my eyes staring ahead, focused on nullity, my voice contributing its halting, rhythmless theme to the conversation's unintelligible symphony. Ah, that strange wild babel that our talking was. It seemed to epitomise our condition. I can hear it now, echoing strangely from the past, that quaint mixture of thin unrelated, polyphonic themes, you could hardly call conversation. Voices broke in through the noise of the gramophone, rarely evoking a response on the same theme; or when they did, the theme was soon lost and another would come in and die on a faint note . . . . "If only this bloody rain would stop, we might get some hours in . . . ." "I wonder where we'll all be, say in six months' time?" "Welfare . . . I'd like to see some . . ." "Oh, for Christ's sake change the record someone—put on that Mary Martin one." "Going down to the big city to-night, Geoff?" "It's his turn with that Wendy woman." "That bitch!" "Well, her father was District Commissioner somewhere wasn't he, before the Japs got cracking?" "Besides, what else can you get—ask Tony." "Christ, what's that bloody noise? The mail plane. That bloody kite flies through anything, and here we are, sat on our arses, grounded for ever and for ever, amen." "To think that one Lancaster could carry all the bombs our whole f . . . Squadron staggers into the air with; the chaps back in England get all the joy." "Whose coming out in the rain for a shower?" . . . "Never mind the boys in England. One day, far, far in the future, I won't say when, perhaps in 1955, they'll give us Mozzies . . . ."

Idle, useless words they were, on cheap, threadbare themes. But with the rain running off the soaking thatch and splashing into the mud drain that ran around each hut, and the sound of the white ants crawling about inside

the bamboo, those voices wove a wild strange music, a symphony of the lost, which kept us from the contemplation of the unconfrontable.

\* \* \* \*

And then through the atmosphere of chaos, came the news: In the white cities, the civilised places, where they had cinemas and sanitation, there had been discussions, conferences. There had even been decisions, and putting down in black and white, whose import eventually penetrated over the acres of rice-fields, across rivers, through swamp, between the clipped tea-bushes, and finally through the jungle itself, to us in our outpost. We were to be disbanded, scattered far and wide over the face of this sub-continent. It was actual disintegration; but it meant a chance of escape too, for even this thrice-cursed land, we said, surely could not contain another prison such as this place had been for us.

Unfortunately for me, I was one of the last to leave; and those last weeks of dissolution, the packing away and crating up of things that even in delirium had retained some atmosphere of the familiar, had been straws wildly clutched at; the disappearance, so quiet as to be almost imperceptible at first, of familiar faces; the farewells; the growing number of cane chairs standing empty in the Mess at night; the empty places at the dining table; the strange silences that fell, and the feeling, as you undressed at night, alone in your basha, the yellow lamp dim, the mosquitoes seething, the blackness everywhere around you outside, the feeling that you were indeed, alone, quite

alone, in the jungle ; that every hut was, in fact, empty, hollow and black inside—all this accumulation of sensations brought the delirium that had been endured for so many months, to a suddenly heightened pitch, and I snapped.

It happened very simply. I tossed and turned for two nights before the fever rose, and then went into a field hospital. I soon had to get out of that, so bad was the food, and so filthy the bedding, and clothes, the slovenly Bengali orderlies brought me to wear. A few days later, when I seemed better, my turn to move off came. I wasn't fit to travel, but I was determined to go. I knew that now that the jungle had at last broken through the defence, I must get away quickly. On the way the fever returned ; the journey became delirious. It remains now in my imagination a set of lurid pictures in red and black, the edges of which disappear into darkness and formlessness. Once arrived in the city, I was taken over by the hospital, and relaxed into the soft, sweet sleep of the knowledge that my fate was no longer in my own hands.

\* \* \* \*

It was thus that I seemed to be washed clean of the green madness that had invaded me. But as I grew each day better in the hospital, it seemed that each pound of new flesh I put on, was that of a different person, entirely new to me ; as though I had rid myself of the mad stranger only to find another stranger in his place.

Eventually I came over this side of the country and moved amongst a new set of faces, on a new job, in a

different climate. And then one evening I became aware of a strange familiarity about things, a sinister familiarity, as though someone I had known, but feared to recognise, was sharing my room with me.

And to-night I was talking to Flying Officer T . . . . with whom I had already become friendly and had spent some evenings in town and elsewhere, and suddenly, as I stared hard into his face, I realised that, for the life of me, *I couldn't remember his name.*

2  
THOSE AT HOME





# The Grey Parrot

by MICHAL JAMES

LADY Cynthia Hedley was lying on her blue sofa reading the *Evening Standard*. Her legs were tingling with pain. She had been standing all day, fitting difficult clients, advising them about alterations and listening to their woes. At last she could relax. Presently she would telephone to Nurse Feathers to come and give her some massage. Meantime she waited, sunk in heavy blue cushions, listening to her grey and red parrot chuckling in the window.

"Who's a beautiful boy?" she said lovingly. "Beautiful, oh so beautiful, aren't you Jackie?"

"Goodbye," muttered the parrot. "Goodbye".

Lady Cynthia pursed up her lips and made the sound of kisses.

"How's my sweetheart?" she crooned. "Mummy's treasure."

The parrot swung to the top of its cage, inclined its beautiful head sideways and let out a shrill miaow. This was a new trick and amused the jaded people waiting outside in the bus queue, shuffling slowly forward in the August heat.

"Naughty Jackie," she chided. "Naughty Jackie to say such words."

Lady Cynthia lived in Bayswater. She had lived in the same house for thirty years, at first with four servants and a husband, now alone save for one sewing woman and the lodgers. Her husband was dead. She had adored him and

kept him. She had never loved him. Now that he was dead she loved the parrot, lavishing on him all the affection that her husband had never earned.

Lady Cynthia was poor. At one time shē had run dress shops in London and Paris, but when war came she had to close them and carry on the business from a room in her private house. It did not pay. She only employed one sewing woman but, as they rarely sold a dress these days, it was all she could do to pay her her wages. Between them they made a living out of alterations. It was dreary work, always unpicking, letting-out, shortening skirts, turning jackets. They got tired of the smell of faded clothes. The bits that littered the floor were always drab bits and would have been no good made into a patchwork quilt.

Then Lady Cynthia decided to take in lodgers. She did not bother to call them paying guests. They were simply lodgers whose money would help to pay her rent and rates. At first, diffidently, she let two rooms both to people recommended to her by friends. Now, less fastidious, she had strange young men and women in every corner of the house from attics to basements.

Lying on her blue couch, with loose pages of the *Evening Standard* scattered on the floor around her, she thought idly about her lodgers. To her, now, they were becoming her children. Some of them called her "Aunt Cynthia", teased her and flattered her. She loved being teased, especially by young men. The difficulty about liking her lodgers was that they quickly made more demands upon her than strangers. All her life a selfish woman, she found herself unexpectedly wanting to mother them, to cook them appetising meals and send them off to bed with hot milk when they were tired. But she was too tired herself after serving clients all day, cleaning the house, washing-up, answering letters. And her head ached

more every day. She took aspirins and sleeping tablets but they could not deaden those needle-pricks behind her eyes or quell the perpetual buzzing in her ears.

From her room on the ground floor Lady Cynthia could hear everyone go in and out. In the evening, loneliness shuffled about her like a padding footman when the front door had slammed and the last taxi had borne them away. Then, alone, she would draw the decorated screens nearer to the back of her couch, trying to make the room appear cosy and small. She would place Jackie's cage on a stool beside her, turn on the wireless, read the marriages and deaths from the morning paper. All the evening, however, she was listening; listening to the recognizable and intimate sounds of her own house. A door banging in the basement or a window rattling in the bathroom interrupted the most engrossing talk from the B.B.C. She would catch the sound and, with a proud, proprietary sensation, localise it. In her head ran no indeterminate or composite sounds. That little rap was the tassel of the blind against the pane in the Air Force boy's bedroom. The tiny groan accompanying it came from the swaying door of the girl lodger's wardrobe.

Lady Cynthia knew all their steps. She knew the way they slid keys into locks and how they switched on the hall lights. They did not know each other so well as she, by listening, knew each one of them.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the telephone bell. It was a soldier wanting to be put up for the night. Such casual people were very useful. The difficulty was that they brought no rations with them and Lady Cynthia had to give them her own butter and tea.

The whole business of buying food worried her. Before the war she had never liked shopping and had shuddered at the mesmerising smell of grocers' shops. Now, she had

to face them. She would hurry off in a cab and bring all her little ridiculous packages back in her arms. The curious thing was that she was always losing things. It frightened her sometimes to imagine what might be missing in the morning. Butter seemed to be the most elusive thing. Lately she had often felt impelled to get up during the night and to go downstairs to the refrigerator to see if all the little pats were still there. At the beginning of the week she arranged the tiny lumps of butter on different plates and carved their owners' initials on them with a fork. Her own portion she placed in a special green pot with an acorn on the lid.

Today was Tuesday. That meant that there would be plenty of butter for the soldier. He would not need much if she made him a fat omelette with powdered egg.

She began to remember omelettes. There were the flat, rather leathery ones during her honeymoon near Sorrento. After a delicious lobster, she had exclaimed, absently leaning an elbow on the iron balcony of the terrace: "And now I'd like an egg, please." The omelettes had been served, but they had let them grow cold, brown and wrinkled before they had turned from the view of Capri sprawling like a recumbent woman under the moon. Omelettes at Florence, omelettes at Taormina; lavish, swelling, light as cotton wool. And the salads. Tiny gherkins, oval tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, green and black olives, moist, unripe almonds. Omelettes and salads. All over Europe she had eaten eggs, chasing the sun.

It was nearly seven o'clock and the room suddenly darkened by thunder clouds. As she turned over on the couch, determining to get up, Creeda, her only girl lodger, tapped on the door.

"Well, my child," Lady Cynthia said, "have you had a good day?"

"No, a horrid one."

"Why horrid?"

"Oh, I don't know. Nothing worse than a Ministry."

She sat down and lit a cigarette, steadying her voice. Tired, black rings were beneath her eyes. Her pale hair was lifeless. Lady Cynthia recognised the fatigue, but was too self-engrossed for more than routine politeness.

"Have you had supper?" she asked.

"No. Not yet."

"Would you like me to cook you something?"

It was an idle question, meant to be answered in the negative. Creeda usually went out to dinner.

"Thank you very much, but I'm not hungry," she said. "I don't want anything cooked. Just some bread and cheese and coffee."

Lady Cynthia sighed. "Very well, my child. There's cheese there and you know where the bread is."

She felt ill-humoured tonight. She could feel the irritability rising, the boredom that was engendered and intensified by this room littered with old fashion magazines and cotton strands.

The girl paused in the doorway.

"Can I make you anything?" she said. "You look tired. Shall I bring you something up here?"

"No, thank you. I won't eat anything. I don't feel very well. My head has been aching all day. I'll just stay here a little longer."

The girl looked down at the ageing woman on the sofa. It struck her that Lady Cynthia's hands with the pin-pricked fingers were like iris roots sprawling over the soil. The flabby flesh below her chin was purple and repulsive. Fearful lest she be ensnared in a web of pity, the girl dwelt on these ugly symbols of decay. Age was hideous, she thought, but must not be sentimentalised.

She must not sympathise weakly with loneliness and fear. Shutting the door behind her, she snuffed out the flickering candleflame of kindness which might have been aroused, terrified of the steady light of understanding into which it might grow.

She climbed upstairs to her room at the top of the house. Eighty-seven stairs, then a lovely view of roofs and tree-tops. She stood at the window for a few moments watching silver-edged cumulus clouds split up and turn purple. She looked forward gratefully to the impending storm.

Turning to go downstairs, she was startled by a brilliant bowl of roses on a little table. Lady Cynthia must have put them there for her. Ashamed of her previous callousness, she stood before them. They were red and cream country roses with short and sturdy stems, far sweeter than the etiolated pink ones sold on London barrows.

Downstairs in the kitchen Creeda laid a tray, put on a kettle, cut some bread. Then she went to the refrigerator to find some butter. There the little pats were, in the row of glass dishes with Lady Cynthia's green one at the back. She took them out carefully. She had been away for a week, so hers would be a new pat. There was only one new one, still wrapped in greyish-white paper and so far bearing no owner's initials. Taking it out, she unwrapped the paper and added the butter to her tray.

Feeling peaceful now, she potted about humming vaguely. She would take some coffee up to Lady Cynthia and thank her for the roses. She would say something nice to her about the parrot. Oh, this was better than having to go to a restaurant to eat, better than pleading for dubious food at snack bars. How kind Lady Cynthia was at heart, how different from the professional landlady with whom she might have had to live. Two students came down while she was there, then a French sailor

whom she did not know. They all busied themselves with saucepans and frying-pans, laughing, getting in one another's way, intent on individual mixtures.

Upstairs, Lady Cynthia was listening. The parrot, on the floor of his cage, was running through all his phrases, very quickly, very softly. "Hello, Jackie. Hello; Beautiful boy. Goodbye, old man. Goodbye, Jackie. Miaow."

Lady Cynthia sat up. As she did so, her legs gave a violent twinge of pain and the top of her head seemed to slip forward over her eyes like a hat. She held her forehead with one damp hand and pushed it firmly as though afraid that the frail, faded skin could not hold back this thrusting pain. She closed her eyes and was aware of a pain in her spine, high up, near the neck. Under her hand, the pulse in her temples was beating now slowly now at a gallop, like a demented metronome. Frightened, she opened her eyes, and stared fixedly at a Dresden shepherdess on the mantelpiece. But the little figure would not keep still. It lurched to meet a Rockingham greyhound, then toppled sideways towards a jug of carnations.

"I'm ill!" Lady Cynthia exclaimed. "I'm ill, I'm ill."

Carefully swinging her swollen legs over the edge of the couch, she bent her head and waited, ready to move to the telephone to call the doctor.

But then a faint click from below stopped her. It was the rubber closing of the refrigerator door. *Her* refrigerator. This was her joy, her favourite possession in the house, bought with the proceeds of her first fur coat sale. And as she listened a tremendous wave of anger swept through her. How dared they touch her refrigerator, leave her alone upstairs and join together to pry into her food cupboards? Why should they even go near her kitchen, these strangers, these laughing, off-hand young men and women?



The pain in her head was like the buzzing of hundreds of bluebottles as she walked down the stairs.

As she entered the kitchen they all stopped what they were doing and the young men cried cheerfully: "Aunt Cynthia! Will you have some of this?" Only Creeda did not speak. She was solemnly pouring boiling water into a coffee pot. Lady Cynthia ignored them all, and, head held high, walked to the refrigerator.

"Who's been touching the butter?" she demanded.

"I've got mine, Aunt Cynthia," the Frenchman said.

"I don't want yours. Someone has muddled them all up."

Turning, she noticed Creeda's tray on the table. Two slices of bread, a lump of cheese, two ounces of butter.

"There!" she exclaimed. "That's my butter. There's no name on it, is there? It's mine. For my soldier."

"I'm sorry. I thought it was mine," the girl said. "I haven't started it."

"Yours! I won't have you going to my ice box. I hate people coming into my kitchen. I don't want any of you coming into this part of the house at all."

There was silence.

Lady Cynthia went on. "Your butter was put out with the others. You must have finished it."

"But I've been away. I haven't begun it this week."

"You have begun it. I took it up myself with your tray the other day. You must have finished it."

The girl's face and the French sailor's had merged into one; an alarming head glittering with orange spots which jiggled up and down like a turnip on All Hallow's E'en. Shoulders raised in indignation, she began wrapping the butter up again with slow, fumbling fingers.

But suddenly Creeda lost control.

"Oh, yes, of course," she cried. "I threw it out of the

window in my sleep! Because I don't need butter. Because I have so much food here."

"Threw it out of the window. Threw it out of the window," Lady Cynthia repeated. "Oh, I see. You are being sarcastic."

The girl laughed hysterically. "Oh, not at all."

She was trembling. Her mind had lost its physical control of her tongue so that the flat phrase emerged on the air as a wavering cry. She turned her back on Lady Cynthia, and lit a cigarette, staring miserably at a copper warming pan beside the gas stove. The other lodgers were standing about, clumsily holding plates and cups as though arrested by some freakish Pompeian god. She did not know what they were thinking. Did they know she had not taken the butter? Why had Lady Cynthia turned against her suddenly with such violence? Oh, the roses, the lovely, lovely roses. What was happening to them that they were quarrelling, in a kitchen, about scraps of food? She liked Lady Cynthia and was sorry for her in her pain and her loneliness, yet she was being rude to her, shouting at her, being impertinent and common. As she drew in the harsh smoke of her cigarette, the tiredness of living in cities and the hatred of sordid offices littered with cigarette ends and cups of tea rolled into a ball and bounced at her. She tried to apologise, but instead of words only sobs came from her throat.

Lady Cynthia gabbled: "I'm sorry, my child. I made a mistake. Don't cry. Don't be angry with me. Let me make you a nice omelette. Yes," she repeated, "an omelette. Let us all have omelettes. Lots of omelettes and wine, wine."

She ran a hand through her white hair and faced them all, smiling. Her gesture was frozen by a flash of lightning, her cry drowned by the immediate clap of thunder.

Wind rushed along the passage and, all over the house, doors slammed.

Creeda turned away. Shoulders hunched in an unreasoning attempt to hide her emotion, she walked jerkily towards the stairs. At the other side of the baize door she stood still, shivering. It had begun to rain.

Lady Cynthia watched the green door swing shut. She felt curiously relieved. She did not notice the other lodgers. She wanted Jackie. She wanted her blue sofa. The blue-bottles were roaring in her ears and swarming round her as, clinging heavily to the iron balustrade, she forced herself slowly upstairs again to the business room.

She opened the door with head erect, knowing that if she bent forward the blue-bottles would sting her. They were against her, too, but she was safe from them on her lovely sofa. They never came for her there.

Rigidly she walked towards Jackie's cage.

"Jackie boy, my sweetheart, kiss Mummy, darling," she whispered.

The parrot hopped down to the corner of its cage.

"Mummy's tired, Jackie," she said. "So dreadfully tired."

The parrot stared through his round, black eyes. The Dresden shepherdess stared and the Rockingham greyhound stared. Then they all began to laugh. So did the people outside in the 'bus queue and a soldier standing on the doorstep ringing the bell. Fifty years' collection of bric-a-brac was tinkling with amusement.

Holding her ears in her hands, Lady Cynthia was forced to her knees in defeat. As the blue-bottles began to sting in their hundreds she grasped the bars of the pale blue cage for support.

Instantly the parrot leant forward and sharply bit the swollen fingers.

"Mummy's tired," he chuckled. "Good-bye, good-bye."

# There's Always a Way in the Army

by SAMUEL W. TAYLOR

NOBODY paid much attention to Private Jasper Wing before the day he decided to stay in bed.

The CQ came through the Nissen huts at 0545 hours, blowing his whistle and switching on the lights, and we got out of bed in the clammy English cold and jerked our bunks straight and gave our faces a lick and our hair a swipe and grabbed our messkits and broke out the door into formation as the first sergeant's whistle blew at six. Our platoon sergeant called the roll and Jasper Wing didn't answer, for the first morning in three years.

"Where's Jasp.?"

"He's in bed," somebody said. "Must have worked late last night."

"All present or accounted for!" the platoon sergeant reported to the first sergeant.

"All present or accounted for, sir!" the first sergeant reported to the Old Man.

When we were at chow somebody said, "Jasp. wasn't working later than usual last night. You remember he was cutting hair and then he went to bed like he always does."

"Maybe he's sick."

"He'd have to get up for sick call, wouldn't he?"

"He might be too sick."

"Nobody's too sick to get up for sick call. When you get that sick, you're dead."

When we got back from chow Jasper Wing was still in bed. He didn't look sick.

"How was chow?" he asked.

"Grim."

"I didn't miss nothing."

"Are you going to get up?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't feel like it to-day."

The platoon sergeant came in as we were mopping the floor. He was a terror to the eight-balls and fish-heads, but Jasper Wing wasn't an eight-ball or fish-head. Jasper Wing was an old guy, thirty or so. He was a big, placid guy who always worked hard and never made any trouble. He was the company handyman. He'd worked at a lot of jobs in civilian life and he was good with tools. He could do electric wiring and carpenter work and cut hair and fix a jeep and make furniture and do anything you wanted.

"What's the matter, Jasp.?" the platoon sergeant said.

"I don't feel like getting up," Jasper Wing said. He was lying on his back with his elbows spread and his hands under his head, the picture of contentment.

"Sick?"

"No."

"Then you'd better get up."

"I don't feel like it."

The platoon sergeant knew how to handle a goof-up, but Jasper Wing wasn't a goof-up. That was it. He'd been a model soldier, day after day, for three years.

"Look Jasp., you can't do this. You'll get me in a jam."

Jasper Wing did not appear to be worried.

"Jasp. I never done nothing to you. Why you got to do this to me?"

Jasper Wing yawned.

"Going to get up?"

"No."

The platoon sergeant glared around the Nissen hut.

"All right, you guys. Keep your face shut. The first one who opens his trap gets a week KP!"

We went out to the depot to work, and pretty soon the first sergeant came around. He had an electric shaver in his hand.

"Where's Jasp.?"

"Around," the platoon sergeant said.

The first sergeant looked around, asking for Jasper Wing. He came back to the platoon sergeant. "Where's Jasp.?"

"Okay." The platoon sergeant shrugged. "He's in bed."

"In bed? Is he sick?"

"He said he didn't feel like getting up."

"You can't do that in the Army."

"It puts me on the spot, but what can I do? You can't get tough with a guy like Jasp."

They went down to the Nissen hut. Jasper Wing was smoking a cigarette in bed and reading a copy of *Stars and Stripes* somebody had brought him.

"How are you, Jasp.?" the first sergeant said.

"Fine. How are you?"

"Why don't you get up?"

"I don't want to."

"You'd better go to the dispensary."

"I just want to stay in bed."

"See?" the platoon sergeant said.

"Look," the first sergeant said, "here's Lieutenant Tonsilin's electric shaver. It went haywire. You can fix it in bed as good as anywhere else."

"I'm taking a rest," Jasper Wing said.

"But you just can't do that in the Army."

"I am."

"You got to have a reason."

"I got a reason. I want to stay in bed."

"You're going to get me into trouble. I can't just let a man stay in bed. I never done nothing to you."

"That's what I said," the platoon sergeant said.

"Why didn't you keep your big mouth shut?" the first sergeant said to the platoon sergeant. "Can't you take a little responsibility?"

"You kept asking me where he was at."

"You didn't have to tell me, did you?"

"We got to keep it quiet."

"You're telling me." The first sergeant took the electric shaver back to Lieutenant Tonsilin and said, "Jasp. will have to get a new part. He'll fix it to-morrow."

Of course the word got around among the GI's. The mess sergeant fixed up a special breakfast of eggs scrambled in butter, flapjacks and syrup, bacon, orange juice, toast and coffee, and sent it over by a couple of KP's.

"Always wanted to have breakfast in bed," Jasper Wing said. "Tell him thanks."

"He wants to know if you can get up just long enough to fix the field ranges," a KP said. "They're conking out again. It's that red gas."

"I feel like staying in bed," Jasper Wing said.

"They got to be fixed before noon chow."

"Tell him thanks for the breakfast."

As the morning wore on, the debate waxed hot among the men at the depot. Was Jasper Wing sick or wasn't he?

"Maybe he's gone crazy," someone said. "Poor old Jasp."

"He does more work around here than any two men, and what does it get him, nothing."

"He's too valuable to put on a regular company job that calls for a rating. He knows too much."

"I hope he never gets out of bed. It'd serve 'em right. All he's ever got from this outfit is crap."

"I hope he dies, like a sheep or a cow that goes down and won't get up," somebody agreed sympathetically. "It'd serve 'em right."

Of course the officers didn't know. No GI in the outfit was enough of a boot-licker to blab on old Jasper Wing.

About ten o'clock Lieutenant Egbert, who was in charge of the depot, asked the first sergeant about Jasper Wing.

"He was going to make those stock shelves to-day."

"He's busy to-day, sir."

"What's he doing?"

"I'll get him on those shelves first thing in the morning."

"That's what you told me yesterday. Can't I have a man when I want him? He doesn't even have a regular job in the company. He gets excused from KP and guard and room orderly and all extra duty. But you never can get him. What does he do with his time anyhow?"

"He's so handy everybody wants him, sir."

"Well, I want him. I want him today. I've got to get my stock off the damp floor. If I don't see him first thing after noon I'll find out why."

"Yes, sir."

The first sergeant went down to the Nissen hut to see Jasper Wing.

"Egbert has got to have his shelves to-day," he said,



"Why don't you do it today and then go to bed tomorrow? I'll fix it."

"I don't feel like it," Jasper Wing said.

"Why don't you tell me about things like this ahead of time? What am I supposed to do when you don't warn a guy?"

Jasper Wing didn't answer. The first sergeant went out. The motor officer hailed him. "Hey, where's Jasp.? Something haywire with our six-by-six. The boys say it's maybe the ignition but nobody knows. Where's Jasp.?"

He's working for Lieutenant Egbert, sir, on some stock shelves."

"Well, he can take off a few minutes to fix that truck, or there won't be any stock to put on the shelves."

"Couldn't you send the truck to the maintenance shop, sir?"

"Sure. Work orders. Reports. Channels. And get it back next week. Jasp. can fix that six-by-six in ten minutes. He doesn't have a thing to do all day long. He doesn't even have any regular job. But try and find him."

"I'll see what I can do, sir."

"You'll see? He'd better show up pronto, or I'll find out why not."

The first sergeant strode back into the Nissen hut, determination on his face. Jasper Wing was sleeping peacefully. The first sergeant regarded the sleeping man while determination changed to helplessness. He tiptoed out.

The warrant officer hailed him. "Where's Jasp.? He was going to string those wires in the supply room. We can't work without light."

"I'll see if I can find him, sir."

"Don't you know where your men are? I'd like to

know what Jasp. does all day long. You get hold of him and shoot him over to the supply room."

"Yes, sir." The first sergeant went into the orderly room. The old man said, "Didn't Jasp. finish those letter trays he promised me this morning?"

"No, sir. He ran out of nails."

The Old Man shook his head. "I don't know what that man does. I'll have to assign him a job where we can keep track of him."

The mess officer came in. "If Jasp. don't fix those field ranges there won't be any chow cooked," he said. "It'll be cold C-rations."

"Lieutenant Fibbs wanted him to fix a six-by-six," the first sergeant said.

At that moment Lieutenant Fibbs came storming in. "Jasp. isn't making any stock shelves for the depot," he said. "I've been over there. I want to know why I'm given the run-around when I ask for a man."

The warrant officer came in. "Did you find Jasp.? We can't work in the dark."

The Old Man said with quiet formality. "Sergeant, where is Private Wing?"

The first sergeant swallowed. "Sir, he's in bed."

"Bed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"He didn't get up."

"Is he sick?"

"He just said he didn't feel like getting up."

"If you can't control your men, Sergeant, you might report to an officer who can."

"Yes, sir."

"A fine kettle of fish," the warrant officer said. "You told me he . . ."

"I'll go down and see him," the Old Man said. "Come with me, Sergeant. . . . The rest of you men have work to do, I suppose."

"Hello, Captain," Jasper Wing said when the Old Man came in.

"Why are you in bed?"

"I don't feel like getting up, sir."

"I'll have you taken to the dispensary."

"I'm not sick, sir."

"Of course he's sick, sir," the first sergeant said. "He has to be sick. He's worked harder than anybody in this outfit for three years. Always on the go and cutting hair at night, and never missed a roll call before. He don't just stay in bed for no reason."

"Are you going to get up?" the Old Man said.

"No, sir."

"You know the seriousness of what you're doing?"

"Yes, sir," Jasper Wing said, stretching.

"Why are you doing this?"

"I just don't feel like getting up, sir."

As he went out, the Old Man said to the first sergeant: "I don't understand it. Never a bit of trouble for three years, and now this. That makes it hard for me to take disciplinary action. I wish I didn't know about it."

"I tried not to tell you, sir."

"You might have tried a little harder. GI's are supposed to stick together, aren't they? A lot of stuff goes on that I don't know about officially. That's part of your job. Can't you take responsibility, Sergeant? Why do you put this on my head?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"I can't just ignore it. Think of the precedent. What would happen if I did nothing about it? I'll call the dispensary. The man must be sick."

"What if he's screwy, sir?"

"Screwy? Why, Jasper Wing is the sanest man in the Army."

"Yes, sir. But if he ain't sick then it has to be something in his head. Otherwise he wouldn't of stayed in bed. What if they give him a Section Eight?"

"Good grief," the Old Man said. "We'd be lost if Jasp. got a medical discharge. Who could take his place?"

"He might feel different tomorrow," the first sergeant said. "I was just going to say nothing about it and let him rest up today. He's got a day coming anyhow, the way he's worked."

"He certainly has," the Old Man agreed readily. "We might even give him a forty-eight."

"Well, sir, there's an awful lot of things waiting on him."

"They'll have to wait. We'll give him a twenty-four. When did he have his last twenty-four hour pass?"

"He ain't never had a twenty-four, sir."

"You mean this man has never had a twenty-four? Never?"

"He used to figure on it a few times, the first couple of years. But something always kept coming up. We never could spare him for more than a Sunday afternoon and occasionally an evening pass."

"Sergeant, why don't you tell me these things? That's no way to treat a man! He's on pass today. Of course he is."

"Yes, sir. But a man can't spend his pass in bed, sir."

"He can spend his pass in bed if I say he can."

"Yes, sir."

"Yep, he's on pass," the Old Man said with satisfaction. "And he certainly has it coming. It's my responsibility to look after my men."

A jeep was standing before the orderly room. Colonel Thistlefoot from battalion was inside. He was carrying a midget radio.

"Where's your man?" he said. "His barber shop's locked up."

"Was Wing going to cut your hair, sir? I'm sorry; he's on pass."

"On pass? I had an appointment with him. And he was going to fix my radio. What sort of a fellow is he, anyway? Can't I depend on your man?"

"Emergency pass, sir," the first sergeant put in smoothly. "He has relatives over here and there was sickness in the family. He told me to say he was sorry about the haircut, and could you come tomorrow."

The Old Man shot the first sergeant a thankful glance.

"Well, that makes it different," the colonel said. "I'll leave the radio and pick it up tomorrow when I come for the haircut. Say ten o'clock."

"I'll tell Wing, sir."

"Now that I'm here I'll take chow and look around. Nothing formal, just look around, Captain."

The Old Man blinked. "Yes, sir. But I wasn't expecting you."

"Nothing formal, Captain. Nothing formal," the colonel said genially.

But the colonel's happy mood degenerated by the minute. First it was cold C-rations to eat. ("Morale of the men depend on food. There's no excuse for this.") Then he found stock in the depot on a damp floor instead of shelves. ("After they've made the stuff and got it through the U-boats, you treat it like this.") The stock was inadequate in critical items because a truck was broken down. ("You always have an answer, don't you,

Captain?") The supply room was black as a pocket. ("What don't you want me to see in here?")

"It's perhaps a good thing I dropped in informally, Captain," he said. "Your outfit always has looked so spick-and-span on formal inspections. Is it like this ordinarily?"

The Old Man said nothing. He'd already tried to explain.

"I'll walk through the barracks and see how they are day by day," the colonel said.

"Sir, I wasn't expecting you," the Old man said.

"That's exactly the point."

In the first Nissen hut a man was sleeping. Luckily, nothing could be seen but the top of his head.

"What's that man doing here?"

"Man doing here?" the Old Man said.

"He was on duty last night," the first sergeant said.

Jasper Wing yawned, and pulled the covers from his face.

"Hello, Colonel," he said.

"Hello, Wing." The colonel turned to the Old Man. "And just why was it necessary to lie to me about this man being on pass?"

"He is on pass, sir. Twenty-four hour pass."

"So I see. Visiting his sick relatives."

"Relatives, sir?" Jasper Wing said. "I'm an orphan."

"Sir," the Old Man said, "if you'll step outside I'll try to explain."

"We'll stay right here and you'd better explain."

"Well, sir," the Old Man said, "Private Wing decided to stay in bed today."

"Was he on duty last night?"

"Well—no, sir."

"Then why didn't he get up?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Did you ask him?"

"Certainly, sir."

"What did he say?"

"He said he felt like staying in bed."

"And that was that," the colonel said acidly. "If a man wants to stay in bed that settles it, in the Army. Of course there was nothing you could do. He was a full private and you're only the commanding officer. You couldn't do a thing. Your hands were tied. You might have at least called me in a crisis like this. I think I'll spend a little time digging into this outfit you're supposed to be running. Cold food, stock on the damp floor, trucks deadlined, heavens knows what you're hiding in that dark supply room. And if a man decides not to get up in the morning, that settles it."

"Sir," the Old Man said, "Private Wing has had a perfect record for three years. As willing a worker as I've got in my company. A genius in a way—my handy man. If he'd been up the field ranges would be working and the shelves made and the truck running and your radio fixed and your hair cut. It put me in a bad spot. I didn't like to take disciplinary action with a man like that. And he's never had a twenty-four hour pass in three years. It's irregular, but I decided to call this a pass. I thought one was due him."

"And why didn't he have a pass?"

"There were always so many little things to do."

The colonel sat down on the bunk opposite Jasper Wing. He got out a cigarette and offered one to the private, and held a light.

"Maybe you can tell me about it," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Why didn't you get up today?"

"I didn't feel like it, sir."

"I see. And when do you think you might feel like it?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Tomorrow?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Next week?"

"I don't know, sir."

"I see." The colonel considered awhile, smoking reflectively. Jasper Wing smoked reflectively.

"If I gave you a direct order," the colonel said, "would you get out of bed?"

"I wouldn't want to make that decision," Jasper Wing said.

The colonel nodded, and considered some more. He was an old guy, too, around thirty.

"I've been a private," he said. "You've been a private three years, but too good a man to spare for a pass. You go to bed a few hours and the whole outfit falls apart. Yet they pull the T/O on you. You're not in a job that calls for a rating. There's no place in the Table of Organization for you."

"I understand all that, sir."

"I'm going to ask you just one more question, Wing. I want a straight answer, yes or no."

"Yes, sir."

"Would a corporal's rating make all the difference?"

Jasper Wing's eyes were steady.

"Yes, sir," he said.

And next morning Corporal Jasper Wing got out of bed at the whistle.

Proving there's always a way, in the Army. But the next guy who tried it found his pants in the guardhouse.



# The Lighter

by EVA METZGER

I AM on duty. It is Sunday morning. I hate to be on duty on a Sunday morning. It is a beautiful Sunday morning.

Somewhere up in the blue the bell of the village church is summoning the local worshippers, and out they come from underneath the thatched roofs, followed by—attention all—the church parade. Never have buttons shone so brightly, never have caps stuck on just that right way, never have boots been so highly polished. Never have I felt so bored.

I am sitting in my shirt-sleeves on top of my desk, my studded shoes on the window sill, staring at the alluring beyond. With me in the office is Joyce, another clerk, and Sgt.-Major Humphreys from Yorkshire.

It is Sgt.-Major Humphreys who produces a packet of cigarettes, helps himself, pockets the packet, remembers the ladies, pulls the packet out again, drops it and, after collecting the contents, thrusts them out at us. "Anyone got a light?"

I fish for my lighter, uncap it, send the sparks flying and find it doesn't work.

It's a utility lighter, this lighter of mine. My sister gave it to me on my twenty-first birthday to mark my promotion to a grown-up status, but during all these intervening years it has only been another toy to tie me to an already extended childhood. And, I hasten to say, it

is the only toy I have retained during my military career, my cigarette case, fountain pen and propelling pencil having decided to vanish in their own particular way. Now my one, dear lighter, souvenir of days in civvie street, is out of order.

My colleagues hasten to my side and look at the thing.

"It wants a new flint", says Joyce, and Sgt.-Major Humphreys remarks: "There isn't any life in it."

There may be no life in the lighter, but there's plenty left in me. So I redirect the others to their respective working places and begin to unscrew the instrument with my teeth. Out comes the cotton wool, the wick, the spring, the flint, off comes the wheel, rolls under the desk, is retrieved and reinstalled. Of course it's a new flint that is needed. "Anyone got a flint?" Naturally no one has, but the SOS has drawn Lieut. Lawrence—Larrie—to my side. "This thing wants a new flint", he says, "anyone here got a flint?"

An orderly emerges from the sacred sphere below, known as the officers' mess.

"If it's a flint you want, Sir, I think the cook's got one, but I can't say for sure."

The four of us are at him now, and while he once more descends the backstairs, I again tackle the wheel. There's something wrong with that wheel. It wobbles.

"Stop that noise!" shouts Sgt.-Major Humphreys to Joyce who is practising on my typewriter while he is trying to come to some arrangement with the switchboard operator. I have now discovered that the little screw wants tightening.

"Please, anyone, where can I get a screwdriver?" sings me.

"O crying out loud!" exclaims Sergeant-Major

Humphreys, banging down the receiver. "Someone get that woman a screwdriver!"

He tears open the cupboard, excavates a duster and begins to dust the room with the flame of martyrdom in his eyes. "That's what you girls should be doing," he says, "instead of fiddling around with the Yanks and your lighters." At this juncture the orderly returns with the flint in the hollow of his hand. In goes the flint, back goes the spring, the screw, the wick and the cotton wool. Back goes the wheel, and the sparks sprinkle forth. And that's as far as it will go. The lighter now wants petrol.

I like instilling petrol into a lighter, especially when I'm using the Major's supply behind his back. I like it so much that I never quite realise when it's time to stop.

As the familiar smell drifts across the corridor, the Major comes striding into the room and asks: "I say, whatever is this in aid of?"

Inspired by the sight, he pulls out his pipe and demands a light. My great moment has come. I hold out the lighter, close one eye and strike the wheel. I strike it again, and again and again and again. The typewriter has stopped, the duster come to rest. All eyes are fixed on the damp object as everyone has a try, and not only one try. Now the lighter is in the Major's hand. He shakes it, pauses, and then applies one light touch to the wheel. In that instant an enormous flame shoots up in front of him and rolls across the carpet as the lighter makes its way towards the door. The three men are busy stamping on it, and, incidentally, on each other's toes, and then the flame is gone, and a utility lighter remains.

Tentatively the Major stoops down and picks it up with a corner of blotting paper. Then he finds his pipe, brings it out from underneath the cupboard and again prepares to light it.

He strikes the wheel once, he strikes it twice. He strikes it many more times during the next ten minutes. Then, as still nothing happens, he sets his teeth and carefully begins to unscrew the lighter. Out comes the cotton wool, the screw, the spring, and, after that, a tiny speck of something.

“But of course”, cries the Major with victory in his voice. “Can’t you see: this thing wants a new flint.”

And he turns round with a look of triumph on his face and thunders forth: “Has anyone in this place, I say, has anyone here got a flint!”

# The Night Cooks' Hut

by JOAN KNAPE

It was Bailey who set me thinking about it all again: Bailey is the airwoman who was posted in to me yesterday. Sergeant showed her into my office, and after one glance at me Bailey began to show embarrassed signs of recognition, giving me covert looks and anxious smiles as though we were members of the same secret society. To my knowledge, I'd never seen her before, so I didn't respond. Then she could contain her delicious revelation no longer.

"Ma'am," she cried, "I slept next to you at Bargate!"

That is not the sort of intelligence a senior officer enjoys when her own memory is a blank.

"Oh," I said, "did you?" and fell to wondering uneasily what pyjamas I'd worn. I seemed to remember some sordid flannels my friends called the Ugly Toughs, and began to wish Bailey could see the ones I have now. Anyway, I said I hoped she'd be happy, and rang for Sergeant to take her to her quarters; and Bailey departed, still leering at what I was by then convinced was the recollection of me in magenta flannel, too short.

But Bailey had surprised me, and I found myself worrying round the shreds of Bargate until, bit by bit, I had reconstructed a picture of it in my mind. I recalled the hut where we'd slept, the muddy paths, the winds that were always cold. It brought back the physical nausea with which I'd hated the place. The rank grass at the

edge of the camp, the barbed wire rusting under perpetual raindrops, the green and brown camouflage, the forlorn cabbages, icy blue and splashed with mud, the N.A.A.F.I. sign that hung loose and creaked, that walk to breakfast against a steelplated wind and the fatty, hot, unchanging smell of the cookhouse when one got there: it all came tumbling out of my ragbag mind as though I had been there yesterday. I remembered, too, with a pang, as though that self had died, sitting over the sulky stove one Sunday afternoon feeling that I should never be happy again and narrowing all my agony of strangeness and home-sickness into the memory of the smell of toast.

Yes, I recalled a lot; but still I could remember nothing of Bailey. I had slept within a yard of her for six weeks, and then wiped her away. I could visualise no single irrelevant detail; how she brushed her hair or if she didn't; whether she undressed under her nighty or whether she sat around with nothing on poring over her feet; whether she spilt powder on the communal mat, or, worse, left fish and chip papers in her blankets. Did she wake me in the mornings? Or tell me what was on at the flicks? Had she a boy friend and was he nice? I don't know. I had omitted to save her with the lumber.

It's odd how one's memory picks and chooses. Perhaps it lays hold on a name, or a face without its history, an odd remark, or an isolated incident. It's odd, too, how it locks its doors and is careless with the keys. I have never found the key to Bailey, but the same day that she set me thinking about being an airwoman and living on camp again, the smell of cocoa recalled the week I had spent in the night cooks' hut and the vivid taste of cocoa and yellow cake eaten in the stark hours.

There were twenty-six cooks in this hut, most of them working nights, and two of us who weren't cooks, Gladwyn

and myself, so it was taken for granted that we were stuck up. Luckily for me, Gladwyn was startlingly abnormal, so the hut expended its venom on her and left me in anonymity and peace.

Gladwyn had been in the Service for a few weeks only, and, as it happened, the Service retained her for not many weeks more; nevertheless, she believed that she was about to be commissioned, which illusion tinged her behaviour with a curious mixture of bossiness and distant bonhomie. Charitable people with nothing to lose . . . me, for instance . . . could dismiss Gladwyn as having personality difficulties. The night cooks had never heard of personality difficulties; they called her Lady Basket.

Now Gladwyn's bed was next to Eva's, and Eva was the bad girl of the hut. She was a gaunt creature, with lank hair framing a narrow, white face. Her eyes, set too close together, were always red-rimmed and rather sore. She was furtive, and she smelt. I couldn't help thinking of rats when I looked at her, and I tried not to brood on the fact that she helped to prepare our food. On top of this, Eva was amoral, almost illiterate and had no sense of time. Sometimes she would get into bed . . . a simple process . . . at seven or eight in the evening and swear . . . and I mean swear . . . that it was after eleven, and as she couldn't tell the time it was no good trying to convince her that she was wrong. On other occasions, when the returning night cooks would try to wake her at five, ready for the breakfast shift, she would rave at the top of her voice that it was only bloody two and that she was sick of being picked on. At this rate, she soon had us all awake and cursing back, except Gladwyn, who was ineducable and never cursed. Instead, she used to try the Master Race stuff and reason with Eva, even going so far as to say that she knew that she really didn't mean to be anti-social. That, of course.

was what Eva was waiting for . . . an excuse to fasten on Gladwyn, I mean; she loathed her . . . so she would stop her bawling and instead lie gazing at the ceiling, saying slowly, distinctly, and with special reference to Gladwyn, all the filthy words she knew. By then, sleep being out of the question, one of the better tempered cooks would go back to the cookhouse and fetch a pail of cocoa and some slabs of cake, and we'd chat with the night cooks while they undressed and put in their curlers, and drink cocoa till it was time to get up.

Unfortunately, the only effect Eva's baiting had on Gladwyn was to exacerbate her desire to teach and save. Under happier circumstances her insensitivity and active streak of interference might have made her into a famous teacher or missionary; as it was, they made a Roman holiday of her. The day I arrived, for instance, she had discovered that she was foreordained to teach Eva to tell the time. Once the idea occurred to her, it assumed at once the proportions and compulsive nature of a vision. She was obsessed; life couldn't proceed until she had done it. So, as it was her day off, she spent the time making a model clock face, even illustrating it with Dickory Dock. But she went about it with such a public air that sympathy was entirely on the side of Eva and illiteracy.

Well, Eva came in about half-an-hour before lights out; and Gladwyn, who had been waiting for her since tea, pounced. The rest of us got as near as we dared.

"Eva," said Gladwyn, in the confident tones of one doing good, "I'm going to show you how to tell the time."

Eva, who was unlacing her shoes, straightened her back and gave Gladwyn one look of emnity. "You'll keep out of my bleeding way," she said.

The complacency on Gladwyn's smooth face and in her bulging blue eyes did not wilt, but she backed a few



steps automatically. Eva could be violent. Then Eva's curiosity made another opening. "What's in your mit?"

Gladwyn held it out. "It's a clock. You can have it if you like."

Eva took it, looking at it suspiciously like an animal that is uncertain of its food as she turned it over in her hand.

"It don't tick," she said at last. "Bloody rotten clock, if you ask me."

But she went on looking at it, and then began twiddling the hands round. Emboldened, Gladwyn sat on her bed.

"That's two o'clock," she said suddenly.

"Who said?" asked Eva aggressively.

"That's what the clock says, Eva." The didactic tone had begun to creep in. "Now, if you move the big hand . . ."

But Eva had begun to get bored.

"What's it got to do with a mucking mouse, anyway?" She pointed to the picture Gladwyn had painted on it.

"'Dickory, Dickory Dock,'" Gladwyn began to look a bit self-conscious as someone giggled, but she went on quoting,

"'The mouse ran up the clock . . .'"

"Ran up the *what*?" jeered a coarse voice from the end of the hut.

"Dirty bastard, eh?"

"You must learn to e-nunciate more clearly, Gladwyn."

The tension was broken, and the hut was siding openly with Eva, and Eva responded.

"You make me tired!" She threw the model on the floor and began to unbutton her tunic.

"Good old Eva!" cried someone, so's to whip up the fun again. We were still standing round watching. Gladwyn picked up the clock, her eyes fixed on Eva.

"Let her wait till she's a muvver like you," cried one of the girls who'd spoken before, "That'll learn her, eh?"

"That's right," said Eva.

"Eva, I didn't know . . ." began Gladwyn in a shocked voice. As well as being stupid, she had no sense of privacy.

"No? Well, you don't know nothing, see."

"Let's see, *how* many is it, Eva?" The girl winked at the rest of us.

Eva thought for a moment uncertainly. "Three," she said, with an air of making it a good round number.

"And where" demanded Gladwyn in her most welfare voice, "are they now?"

"Evacuated."

"Where to, Eva?" It was the girl who'd winked.

"Up to London," said Eva after a long pause.

There was a rustle of laughter.

"They can't be," said Gladwyn reasonably, "because they've been evacuating children *from* London . . . ."

"That's what I said, didn't I?" Eva took this as a personal issue and advanced menacingly, "London. They can bloody well evacuate mine too, can't they? What's wrong with mine, eh? They're as good as other people's kids and they can be evacuated up London if they want. This ain't bloody Russia!"

"Russia!" squawked a more class conscious someone, and shouted with laughter.

Eva sprang up like a fury and heaved a heavy shoe at the girl who was laughing. The aim was accurate, and the lesson on telling the time was broke up in disorder and a free for all, Gladwyn forgotten. But still Gladwyn didn't learn. She next started a campaign advocating stripping before going to bed. Eva said she had a dirty mind, but she didn't put it so simply.

All this was particularly stupid of Gladwyn when her

own behaviour was not what you'd call normal, measuring the normal by the rigid respectability of those cooks. I've never known such respectable people as those cooks. They even preferred to queue for hours for a turn at bathing behind a locked door rather than use the plentiful showers, because the curtains round the showers were skimpy. Consequently, Gladwyn's academic attempts to convince them that there was nothing shameful in the human body as such merely scandalised them. She had, too, an unfortunate habit of sitting at the table in the middle of the hut wearing nothing but a navel-length vest. When asked on one occasion what the hell she thought she was doing, she replied quite simply that she was writing to her lover. That didn't help any.

I only ever had one real conversation with Gladwyn, and that was the day I was posted. She came nosing over to my bed when I was packing. I tried to throw some clothes over my books, but it was too late. She picked up one or two and looked at the titles, and her eyes bulged at me accusingly.

"I didn't know you were educated too," she remarked in that endearing way of hers: and taking that for sufficient introduction, sat down on my second suit and began to talk. She rambled on into a long monologue on ignorance . . . other people's ignorance . . . and how the more fortunate should fight it for them. I got the impression that for Gladwyn ignorance meant dropping aitches.

"Surely" she shot at me suddenly "you too feel that you simply *must* help those who know no better?"

"No better than what?" I hedged. But it had been a rhetorical question, and she swept on in spate, discoursing on training, leadership and responsibility. She hinted that I should have come forward to help her lead the night cooks. Where, she did not say.

"In our village," she explained, "mothers frighten their children with Grandmama Fitzroy, not with the policeman, when they've been naughty. Do you see what I mean?"

I did . . . only too clearly.

After a while, Gladwyn fell silent; then she sighed.

"Didn't you *love* school?" she resumed. "I did. I was the richest girl in our year. I was on all the committees and in everything: I was awfully popular. People understood me. Of course, it won't be so bad here when I get my commission."

She stayed till I'd finished my packing, rambling on about life and leadership. One thing seemed to be worrying her, and she returned to it again and again: that was the danger of showing weakness. She maintained that a leader must never show any kind of weakness or he would lose his hold over the mob. I suppose if you think of people as either leaders or mob it's understandable, but it seemed to be rather fantastic, and a bit unwholesome.

It occurred to me, remembering it all, that I had only once seen the hut really nice to Gladwyn, and that was the once she came in drunk. It was nearly eleven: the night shift was ready to leave and the rest of us were in bed or just going. Suddenly, the door flew open and someone fell in and floundered over the fire bucket. It was Gladwyn. An incredulous silence fell . . . . *Gladwyn*, looking like common humanity with her hair coming down and mud on her skirt. She sat there looking round owlishly at us.

"'s snowing," she announced at last, fanning herself. It was a stuffy August night.

The cooks yowled, and crowded round her with real affection. A couple of them helped her up, and the rest

followed in delighted procession to Gladwyn's bed. Then the lights went out.

"Bring me a mirror!" cried Gladwyn imperiously. It was better than a music hall turn.

People got torches and gathered round to help, twitting her good humouredly, and going into peals of laughter, as she acknowledged their ministrations with glassy smiles and formal bows. It was so like a parody of exhausted royalty that I was helpless with mirth.

"Coo, ducks," it was the one who was undoing her clothes, "you are in a mess . . . bring us a wet flannel, Dot . . . whatever you been doing to your skirt, eh?"

Gladwyn turned to her with dignity.

"I fell over a bluebell," she said, and then hiccupped.

# The Unholy Trinity

by PATRICIA LEDWARD

HURRAH for babies! Long live babies! They are my trade: I am the midwife and nurse of the district.

Now that my life has entered its third season I am glad to settle down and help other women give birth to their children. My desire to see untiring life on the earth grows stronger as my own vitality flickers out. Whether the babies be legitimate or illegitimate matters not, but let the screams and laughter and dimples of the new generation freshen this swamp of red brick.

My district is one of those overflows from any industrial city, oozing over the hills and woods and pastures. The hills are levelled, the valleys filled in, and then up spring hundreds and hundreds of red, semi-detached houses, arranged in squares and streets and crescents. Following behind the red bricks and tiles comes the rush of people, the screeching, loving struggling families, who beget more people until the city overflows again and oozes still further across the green country.

The overflow that is fragrant, decorated with grassy parks and flowering trees, it called suburbia. The overflow that stinks and breeds disease has no name until it begins to give off foul vapours that are dangerous to society. Then it is just known as the slums.

My home is in one of these potential slums, and I am happy to live among the millions whose life is difficult and unrecorded. Drinking tea by my fire in the evening I feel

as tranquil as a saint who has attained the ultimate peace.

My hours of recreation I spend sitting at my front room window, observing the comings and goings of my neighbours. In this way I perceive so much of their life that I often feel responsible for the mistakes they make.

But I shall no longer sit at the window: I shall buy lace curtains and veil my glass. Through the window-pane I watched the growth of a sin. I could have shouted: "Stop this. It's no joke!" Instead I took a passive part in the misdeed and thought that, by an ignoble deception, a snap of the fingers, the crooked could be made straight again.

The story began one summer evening.

I noticed a young couple walking up the hill arm in arm. They walked as though they were very much in love, soaring up the hill like birds, so great was the joyful sentiment that impelled them. The girl was small and dainty: the man suited his strides to her tip-tapping steps and his arm gently pushed her onward.

They stopped at the house opposite mine. The young man took a latch key from his pocket, threw it up in the air and, like a clown, caught it in his wide mouth. The girl hesitated. He opened the door, seized his bride and carried her over the threshold. Before he put her down and shut the door they both turned and smiled across the road at me and the girl waved her hand. They weren't really smiling at me because the setting sun dazzled their eyes. Their gesture was one of happy farewell. Goodbye to the beautiful world of noise and movement where we met and learned to love! In this small, ugly house we shall create another world of silence and stillness. Goodbye!

I took a fancy to them right away. In a few days I called on them and said if they wanted anything they were

to let me know. Arthur was twenty-one, a man of Kent, with huge limbs and untroubled eyes, the colour of a pale blue sky. Next to his wife he treasured the ridiculous scrap of garden at the back of the house. He said he loved the soil because it covered the whole earth . . . the same soil, the same grass, the same trees. Gwen was nineteen, a dark, fragile creature from Wales. She told me she came from up the valleys, and yes, she said, she liked to sing.

"She's shy, but you listen to her when she thinks she's alone," said Arthur. "She has all the birds from the Kent woods in her throat!"

"Are you thinking of starting a family?" I queried.

"Not yet," they said.

When Arthur went to work and Gwen was left to do the housework she sang, thinking herself alone, and I listened. They were the merriest songs I have ever heard. How good it is to be alive! O beautiful world! O darling husband! Tra-la-la-la-tra-la!

The beautiful world presented these youngsters with a beautiful war, a war that would in time take the songs from Gwen's throat and the simplicity from her husband's eyes.

On the features of the women among whom I moved I perceived the shadow of the disaster. In their lips, their eyes, their foreheads, even in the way they did their hair, I saw fear for the safety of their men. Sometimes as they worked in their kitchens, or rested in their parlours, fear would sidle up to them and deprive them temporarily of reason. I saw it happen many times, but could prescribe no antidote.

At first the degrading worry of soldiers' wives didn't touch Gwen. Arthur strode down the hill to join up, a shabby attache case tied round with string bearing all his necessities. Once a day the postman delivered a letter



from Arthur to Gwen: every evening Gwen pushed a letter in the pillar-box: frequently Arthur came on leave, worked in the garden and ruffled his wife's curls.

Came the crisp days of autumn, the tedious winter nights, the amethyst twilights of spring and then once again the red houses sweated beneath the summer sun. But Arthur came home no more. Gwen told me he had gone overseas. She changed her hairstyle after his departure, forcing her curls into hard upward sweeps that made her look sophisticated. Her eyes were vacant, as though the light in them were dim. Worry left its revolting smear across her face. She stopped singing.

While Arthur fought backwards and forwards across the desert Gwen went out to work in a factory. I thought she must feel lonely coming back to an empty house every night, and I told her she was welcome to live with me. She refused. I ought to have been insistent, but what should be and what is are very different things.

One evening I saw her return from work escorted by an airman. Like Gwen he was dark and small boned.

"Is he your brother?" I asked.

Gwen shook her head.

So the next time I saw that airman I took a good look at him. I wondered if he was to figure as the shadowy person who so often slips into another's life, changing its course, a person as fatal as an uncharted current at sea.

He had dark, glowing eyes, a pale skin and a thin-lipped mouth. The kind of a man, I thought, who would examine the workings of his own mind with great interest; the kind of man to concentrate and reserve his feelings until they became savage, tearing themselves out of him and lacerating both himself and the object of his emotions. He appeared to be a man of violent extremes, an ascetic one moment, a libertine the next. Gwen, that creature of

fire and crystal, would enchant such a man. I felt afraid for her. But I still sat at my window and watched.

Nearly every night the airman escorted her to the house, where he bade her goodnight abruptly. One night he went indoors with her and stayed there. This happened night after night.

I don't believe in sermons: these seek to alleviate particular difficulties by a series of general solutions. I disapproved of Gwen's behaviour, but my approval wasn't important. What did matter was Arthur. So I made up my mind to preach.

Sitting very still she listened to all I had to say. Then she lifted her remote eyes and looked at me. There was no shame nor guilt in her face, only a great wilfulness and that scarcely perceptible smudge of worry.

"Thank you, nurse," she said. "Thank you for speaking so honestly. Now I'll be honest too. You've spoken with sentiment, but without reality. You've spoken from the experience of your body, but not from the experience of mine. You've never known what it's like to be married, so how can you know what it's like to be parted? Let me tell you this, nurse, to sleep in an empty bed is very bad when you're used to sleeping with a man. But to know that this state of affairs will go on three years, maybe four or five, that's hell."

"A silly and weak point of view," I said.

"Perhaps it is, nurse, perhaps it is. But believe me when your body's young it needs to be loved. It asks to be satisfied. And I've so much love in me, nurse, that it'll drive me to madness if I don't make use of it."

"And Arthur?"

"This has nothing to do with Arthur. I love Arthur so much that the only way I can tell him about it is to sing and sing. I love him in the way that goes on for ever, like

the streams in Wales. This affair can't harm Arthur. There, nurse, I've spoken."

Her manner was majestic and she subdued me. But I didn't know whether she was speaking with the moral assurance of an adult woman, or with the ostentation of a flattered girl.

The answer was given sometime later when she came to me, cringing like a child that has been ill-treated.

"Nurse, you must help me," she said. "I've slipped up. I'm going to have a baby. I don't know what to do. It's the end of everything. Arthur, Arthur, forgive me."

Her desperation broke out in hysterics: I slapped her back into sense. The situation was urgent and together we must master it.

"Tell Arthur exactly what you told me," I said. "He may understand and be merciful."

"Never," she said with finality.

We concocted a plan of deception. I felt sick with shame. Arthur would be stupefied when he received the first of Gwen's letters, begging him to let her adopt a baby because she was feeling so lonely. That he would believe in the authenticity of her plea I didn't doubt. That he would be perplexed I was sure. He would discuss the matter with his mates, for Arthur was no brooder. He would suffer beneath the weight of his indecision.

Gwen wrote many times, underlining her loneliness, saying that a baby would give her something to live for.

And at last he replied, sending a letter in which every word looked heavy with consideration. He said he understood her desire and, although it was against his instincts, he would agree to her plan. He trusted her to enquire extensively into the baby's pedigree.

She prepared for her confinement with tranquility. She had no conscience. It was the voice of fear that spoke in

her, motivating her actions. The sudden and nameless horror that I had seen paralyse women in their kitchens and parlours had played havoc with Gwen. She gave herself to the airman through fear that the love in her would shrivel: she deceived her husband because fear suggested that Arthur would be furious if he knew the truth. Arthur's rage was rare and terrible. He smashed and killed, like a summer storm.

The airman, the anonymous and fatal third, slipped out of Gwen's life as quietly as he had entered it. His work was done; he had shifted the course of her life.

I felt very uneasy. My close association with human life as it lay in bed face to face with death, had made me revere the forces that exist beyond our comprehension. I had a suspicion that our plan would be frustrated. I refused to act as midwife to Gwen. If she died her blood would stain my hands for ever. Her time came and she went into hospital.

As soon as I could I went to see her.

"Come back later," said the nurse. "She's having a difficult time."

I went back later. The nurse greeted me with a smile. "You can come in now," she said.

By the side of the exhausted mother lay not one baby but three. She had given birth to triplets.



3  
THOSE RETURNING



# The Way Back

by SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER

"AND on the first of July," he said, "I landed in England. And that is the end of my story."

"If it had not been for my parents," he added, "I would have stayed in France. In France, or in Europe. Somewhere around. It would have been easy enough. At the Vélo d'Hiver when they were taking our particulars the clerk asked me where I joined up, and I said Liverpool. *Liverpool? C'est en Belgique, n'est ce pas?* she said to the girl beside her, and the other girl said, No, England. But down I went, no one minded, they were too busy being pleased to see us back. If I could have been reported dead I would have stayed. People soon get over a death. But prisoner and missing is the devil, my parents would have gone on worrying. So I came back. Just in time for the election, but of course I've got no vote."

As they walked out of the restaurant he said, "Do you think I've changed? In appearance, I mean."

"A great deal," she said. "Your nose is more hooked, your whole physiognomy is changed. You have *un air formidable*. It's very becoming."

Now he began to look at the traffic going westward through the country town. As though responding to some sort of wireless summons the driver of a lorry slowed down and drew in to the edge of the pavement.

"Like a lift, soldier?"

"Taunton," he said, "or thereabouts."



"I can take you as far as Yeovil."

"That'll do nicely.—For while I'm waiting for my medical," he said, "I'm putting in time hiking to all the places I've been a misfit in. To find out if it was them or me. Well, goodbye. Thanks a lot for finding me changed."

A week at home, she thought, was as much as he could stand. The brewery, the gasworks, the out-lying bungalows were behind them, the flat and flourishing countryside imposed its contours on the course of the road.

The driver asked "Been back long, soldier?"

"Fortnight tomorrow."

"Germany?"

"Poland, actually."

"Quite a step," said the driver. "How did you get there? Do you smoke?"

The cigarette burned out between Cauborg and Alençon, for to begin with the driver asked questions and interposed glosses from other narratives by other soldiers. Ash-trees and hedgerow, elms, unimpaired steeples, buildings trim or sagging under nothing more than senility, flowed towards them, whisked by, were demolished behind them, fuelled the narrative by being and then not being. It was easier to tell his story thus than while sitting in a restaurant demolishing stewed rabbit. Food should be eaten in silence anyway, with the savage attention which is its due.

The narrative travelled eastward, was noosed to a standstill, was released and went eastward again, broke its impetus, halted, and turned back.

"Pity you couldn't get as far as Moscow," said the driver. "But I daresay you'll get there some time or other. Shouldn't think you feel altogether like settling down, not at your age."

"As long as they don't settle me down in some base . . . well, thanks for the lift."

"Thanks for the story," said the driver. "Best of luck, I'm sure. Meet you in High Street, China, eh?"

He drove off, the engine noises whacking his ear-drums.

Oughtn't to dump him in a base, he thought. A week of the old spit and polish would be as much as he could stand.

This time it took longer to pick up a ride; or he was harder to please. Two private cars paused to invite him but he waved them on politely, saying he was not going their way; though the builder's lorry he mounted was travelling in the same direction. This time, too, he kept his story to himself. Yes, he was just back. Yes, he had been a prisoner. Yes, it was all right being home. He sat and stared at the oncoming road. The landscape flattened out, its contours became less imposing, the road seemed able to assert its independence and take a straight course. Where it crossed a muddy little river that shuffled along under willow trees he halted the driver.

"Going to the camp, are you? Well, you'll see some changes since your time."

"I can see them from here," he replied.

The crest of the last low hill was covered with huts, huts sprawled down its flank. They were painted over with a camouflage the colour of stale mustard. But under the milky sunlight of the day the mustard colour suggested, rather than vegetation, some low form of animate life. It was as though the hill were covered with a plague of yellow caterpillars, caterpillars which since he had last been here had pullulated a hundred-fold.

As a distant window tilted towards the sunlight, as a glass-panelled door opened or shut, minute vibrations of light shot out; and it was as if the caterpillars were slightly squirming.

He gave it a long steady look, and then struck off across the meadow, walking on the raised bank of the stream. Even now, in July, with the meadow-sweet in bloom and the dragon-flies hawking over the stream, the rushes along the embankment were fastened together with wisps of muddled grass, the tide-mark of the winter's flood. The air had a particular smell, wild and pure, the smell of air unbound from the usual tether of hedgerow. As far as he could see before him there were no hedges. Banks of willows, ditches, sometimes a wire fence, marked the divisions of the land. He was back once more, walking freely where three years before he had walked furtively and defiantly, defending in the teeth of a communal carefree life his right to be solitary and full of care. He was back once more, and the mood of those days rose up and re-clothed him, so that he found himself suddenly and intently absorbed in forgotten preoccupations, so that the downward sighing of a willow-bough became his loathing of a red face adjusting itself to a mouthful of beef, so that a hairy plaster of mud on a post where cows scratched themselves became his conviction that when he made his first drop a fly would be drawn down his windpipe, and he would land choking—but to ignominy, not death.

Now he could see the farm quite clearly, a small composed building of earth-coloured brick, with a hooded porch and a round window above it. It had an air of being tranquilly idle, of sitting with its hands folded, among the rabble of barns and sheds and ricks that surrounded it. As one came nearer the illusion of idleness was lost, the house rang like any other farm-house with noises of feet, buckets, children and crockery. But from here it sat with its hands folded, watching the pears ripen on the south wall.

He skirted around it. Something was missing, some-

thing that had been there before. The dog. The dog that always barked was not barking. Just as he was thinking it must be dead—it had been a most objectionable unhappy cur, always tied to its kennel, always fretting itself into hysterics—he caught sight of it, still tied and with the same dirty enamelled bowl still beside it. But this time it was not barking. He shrugged his shoulders and smiled, and walked on. One brings back something from one's travels, if only the ability to best an old dog on a chain.

Ahead of him, in the field alongside the familiar track, some men were gathering in the remnants of a crop of rushy hay. He could see the flies round their heads, fetched by the smell of their sweat. He turned off to avoid them. In this sea-level landscape with its foam of meadow-sweet, its banks of green willow rippled and tumbling like some real wave thrust up through the sea-level earth, one could walk at random yet never lose one's bearings. The last time he had been here he had tried, most deliberately tried to lose himself. But in vain. A detail of the horizon, a group of poplars, a cattle-shed, a gated bridge across a drain—there was always something to whistle him back. It would be difficult to get lost even in the whole of England, England is so small; what hope of getting lost on Sedgemoor?—unless one is poor Monmouth, lying draggled in a ditch with a pocketful of field peas.

Monmouth's men had fought with pikes, with clubs, with scythes. In 1940, pikes were issued to the Home Guard, and all the old fire-eating gentlemen went round saying that the pike was a damn fine weapon, sir, and a match for any automatic, cold steel, sir . . . Unfortunately Monmouth's men had not found it so. Yet their strategy had been good, taking advantage of the terrain and its

morning mists, tying up their adversaries in rheins and ditches. The mistake had been so immediately to engage in battle. With maquis methods a long smouldering insurrection might have changed the story of England; though sabotage is not so effective against an enemy who moves on horseback, not by train, who depends on local industries and not on power-stations. Yet the moral effect, the unsettlement, the demoralisation, would have been as great, perhaps even greater; for using the superstitions of the time . . . And here again he was riding off on the same fallacy, giving King Monmouth's men the mentality of three centuries later, whereas in fact they would have been just as much subject to haunts and witches.

The aspect of a group of willows told him that he had achieved his ambition, and was lost! and in the same moment he saw a man with a gun come out from among them.

In an instant he was flat on the ground, refuging his human-coloured face and hands behind a tussock of grass. He was alive again; and devoted, heart, soul and body, to living. Lying motionless, his ear to the ground, his muscles striking their brilliant bargain between immobility and the power to leap to his feet in a flash, he felt his blood running through him like a sweet music.

The man's foot took a step forward. There was a twang, the twang of a single-stranded wire fence. A rabbit got up near by, flicked its ears, and ambled towards the sound. There was the crack of gunfire, and he heard the pellets scatter and bounce on the dry ground, and the drumming of the rabbit's feet as it galloped off, and the man's slow voice saying, "Missed 'un."

So now he lay still because he had made a fool of himself, hearing the man walk away, pause, and shoot again,

and walk on. A bad shot, he had not got his rabbit this time, either. At last he got up, dusted himself, beat off some ants, and looked about him. The group of willows was still strange, but beyond it, on the southward skyline, he could see the camp in its mustard-coloured camouflage, sprawling and faintly stirring. He was not in the least lost. He had walked in a circle, that was all.

“And I thought I had learned how *not* to do that,” he chided himself as he walked to meet the main road and his next lift.

# The Round-up

by BORIS YAMPOLSKY

It is midnight, but as light as day. The sky is lit with flames and in their glow, the forest stands out on the horizon and clouds sail by overhead. The swampland of Byelorussia is ablaze.

For many years, the Byelorussian people dug canals, built dams and drained the swamps. In the place of whispering reeds a sea of golden grain rippled in the breeze until German airmen dropped bottles of combustibles on the reclaimed boglands; now they are burning day and night. Smoke rolls over the swamp and from the sky, ashes fall like rain. Ashes cover the ground, our faces, the horses . . . We ride into a vast wilderness.

The roads are overgrown with high grass and the fields with rank weeds.

Black, burned villages. Felled orchards, and in them, like tombstones, overturned beehives. Tall black crosses at the crossroads. A very graveyard of a country.

We are riding through what were once the most populous districts of Polesye Region. For three days and three nights we ride and see not a solitary village, not one house. In all those three days and nights we met only a boy tending a cow in a mist-covered field and a half-blind old woman who emerged from her hole in the ground at the sound of our hoofbeats.

Not once did we hear a dog bark, a cock crow, a well-winch creak or a bucket rattle. Not a voice: not a sound.

We canter through a long village street. There are no cottages. On either side, behind the fences of interwoven branches, amid the blackened bricks, are crosses.

On all sides stretches the sombre charred earth. In the swamps are black tree stumps. The hillocks harbour fraternal graves with huge crosses adorned with wreaths of maple. You can see them from afar. While you are at one cross the next appears in sight. And so we ride from hillock to hillock, cross to cross—a road of mourning.

It was from the half-blind old woman who emerged from the ground that I first heard the fearful words "Round-up."

The Germans ringed in the area and closed in from all sides.

The villagers fled to the swamps. Only cripples and invalids stayed behind.

The Germans enticed them with sweets, cigarettes, packets of salt and baking powder. They gathered in the village. And then it began.

In one of the biggest villages in the Pinsk Region, all the inhabitants were burned in the church. In another, all the children were burned in the school. In a third, the people were burned on bonfires. In another they were burned in their homes. So men stood and listened to the screams of the people writhing in the flames and saw to it that none escaped by the windows. When the Germans withdrew their faces were black from the smoke.

The wind moans, ashes swirl and settle on our faces and on the horses.

At last we begin to meet people. Victims of the round-up. People on crutches with blackened, fire-scarred faces. A girl at the well with blind eyes. An old man, silenced forever, his tongue cut out. A human stump, armless



and legless. Propped up against the mound of a dugout he listens to the sighing forest.

After the great calamity, people here have lost all conception of time and all recollections of former life. Here they say "That was before or after the round-up." No earthquake, flood, hurricane or plague has ever brought people such affliction as the round-up.

I am writing these words in a dugout tunnelled deep into a hill in the forest, and camouflaged to tone with the face of the earth. It was only by the sparks from the chimney that I found it.

The tunnel goes deep beneath the roots of the trees. It is hard to tell how many people are here. Three tiers of bunks line the walls at the entrance. In the depths, people lie on the floor. When we enter, tommyguns in our hands, a woman at the entrance screams. Sobs rend the air. Their eyes are dimmed with the darkness, their senses mazed with the silence. They start at every rustle.

In the swinging cradles are babies with wax-like faces. The sick peer out from bundles of rags and grimy sheep-skin coats: delirium, fumes, tears.

I sit in the den until morning: there is no space to stretch my legs. People, like wraiths, pass by. A girl at a spinning wheel is twirling out a thread. She sits all night spinning a thread, continuous, unending as the people's woes, sad and yearning. Someone, crouched beneath the brand, is weaving bast shoes. An old man with frost bitten face is sitting on the ground turning a hand mill with wooden mill stones. He grinds hour after hour, all night long, day after day, to get flour for his bread. And when I speak to him of a wind-mill, his eyes shine. Spreading wind-mill sails, throwing shadows across the fields, seem to him like some remote fairy tale heard in childhood.

While the man grinds, an old woman pounds in a mortar. By midnight she has a few handfuls of millet. She pours it into water and puts it on the fire.

I ride through fields, hazy in mist. Two peasant women are harnessed to a wooden harrow. Behind them follows a boy, barefoot, in a white shirt with a tray swinging on his chest, scattering seed.

The autumn wind moans. Leaves drop and swirl in spirals. They fall like yellow rain, covering the earth with a thick carpet.

The sound of weeping comes from a primitive arrangement shadowed by a chequered kerchief. A blue eyed boy is lying in a tiny cradle slung from three sticks. His father is away at the front. His mother drags the harrow over the sodden autumn earth and it seems as if the ground is stone and the lowering clouds a leaden yoke upon her back.

There's not a bed, not a chair, not a frying pan or bucket anywhere. For a hundred miles round you'll find neither a needle nor a knife. All has burned in the German fire. Here, they eat potato bread, season it with potash, the fertilizer of the peat bog, and smoke birch leaves. Here I saw wooden knives, wooden needles, stone axes, just as if they had dropped from a book on ancient history.

The Germans think all is burnt, scattered as ashes by the wind.

But the image of the mother lives on imperishable with her son, the face of the murdered child is in the memory of the father. The sister is ever before the eyes of the brother. The tenacious memory of the people cannot be burned by fire, slain by the knife or strangled by the rope.

Not far from the River Sluch, on the high stone foundations of the school where the Germans burned two

hundred and fifty children, is a burial mound raised by the people. The wooden cross bears the epitaph—

*“The people’s curse on the German murderers to all eternity. May the memory of those who died be unfading.”*

The Germans march by. They stop, break the cross, scatter the grave. But the next day, as if shooting up from the earth, a new cross appears bearing the same epitaph.

They come again, scatter the grave, plough it over so that the place is unrecognisable.

But you cannot plough over the memory of the people. Again, the mound and the cross rise on the school foundations.

Towns will crumble to dust, rivers change their course, old roads vanish, new ones appear: but never will these burial mounds vanish.

They are the mounds of the twentieth century.

They, like the mounds of Batu, will not disappear.

# Our Convert

by GERALD PILKINGTON

ABOUT twice a year, the International Medical Commission came to our camp. That was quite a day for the British Medical staff, because they felt that, as prisoners of war, they had to do their best to impress the two Swiss doctors who, together with a German, made up the commission. Such was their instinct, founded maybe on a feeling that the Swiss would return to their own country after their visit, and would certainly talk.

Probably they would have to report to their own Army authorities on the morale and bearing of British prisoners in Germany, and so the truth would get about. Socially, too, at dinner parties, in clubs, in their own homes, wherever they went, these two Swiss, and whenever they were at a loss for something to say, they might talk of their visit to the Prisoners' camp near Kassel, where there were 450 British officers.

And of course their audience would be interested, or so the British thought, probably rightly, but a prisoner is always apt to over-estimate his own importance; he cannot believe there are other things more important than himself and his fate, and so he is always worried about the impression he is making.

And thus it was that when the Swiss came, the camp got a week's warning and the hospital began to tick over. Both sides ticked over; the German Commandant and his staff had the same ideas as the British. Two neutrals

were coming; it was important that Switzerland should be aware of the humanity and correctness of the German treatment of prisoners. There were a lot of ugly rumours to be lived down; because the British had made so much capital out of concentration camps. It was important that Switzerland should see the truth for herself; and so, everyone was trying.

The British swept and polished and scrubbed the hospital, because medicine was international, Switzerland known for her cleanliness, and the Royal Army Medical Corps had to show that their standards were higher than anybody else's, even in captivity.

Everyone got very matey because of the Swiss. The German camp doctor, who had a purely supervisory role and left the treatment of patients to his British counterparts; even he started trying. And twice a year, because of the Swiss, drugs would come into the hospital; really useful drugs, and other things too, like sterilizers and cotton wool and large charts with letters on them, to test out the poor prisoners' failing eyesight. And there would be a lot of back-slapping and mateyness and talk about medicine being above war and we doctors must stick together, and maybe a new broom and some soap and a scrubbing brush would be provided by the German canteen officer, and everybody would set to with a will to make the party a real success. And the British doctor, who knew the form all right, would put in a whacking great indent for everything medical he could think of, in a gallant attempt to blackmail the Germans into giving him something because of the Swiss.

And then the big day would finally arrive, and the British doctors would have big lists ready of all those prisoners who wanted to see the Commission.

They would all be sick men, some sicker than others,

and they would all have hope in their hearts on that day, because maybe if the Commission passed them and they were sick enough, they might get sent home; for under the Geneva Convention any belligerent who had signed this, the Prisoners' charter, was obliged to send back to his own country any sick or wounded prisoner who had been passed for repatriation by the International Medical Commission. Well, it was now 1943, and several thousand British had been passed, and although there were rumours of an exchange in the near future, no British had yet got home; nor had any German either, for that matter. But for all that anyone who thought he was sick had hope in his heart whenever the Swiss came.

It had become part of the prisoners' routine, this twice yearly visit of the International Medical Commission. To the large majority of Prisoners, to the fit ones, the thing was of no importance. They were not involved; it did not signify; the Swiss doctors could come every bloody day as far as they were concerned; it made no difference to their lives. The first time had been interesting; new faces and foreign uniforms had driven up to the camp gate in a Mercédès, the Commandant had met them, and it was something for the Prisoners to talk about, something new, it was life, something was actually happening for a change, but now it was dead and familiar, and they rather resented having to clear up and look smart for the benefit of the visitors, who would give them no reward.

To the sick ones who had passed the board already, it was a day of suppressed excitement. Would they, or would they not, bring news with them of an impending exchange? They were getting disillusioned, the sick ones who had passed; the Swiss were always so cautious and neutral, and they never seemed to know anything. What was holding things up? Nobody knew, and nobody cared,

except the sick ones, and they cared desperately. They cared in a body and together; so that when the Swiss had gone they would say to one another oh! so carefully and guardedly, "No news, I suppose?" with so much hope in their hearts and so little in their voices. And there never was any news, nothing real and concrete, only rumours and suppositions and deductions.

And in the evening you would see them walking together in the courtyard; a consumptive, two legless, and an eye case perhaps; and they would be talking quietly together and maybe one would say: "I hear the Swiss told Mcfadden there was quite a chance of an exchange in October," and another would answer, "I heard that, too. I tackled Mcfadden, he never even saw the Swiss, let alone talked to them." Then they would walk on together, round and round, in silence for a little, while the tiny spark of hope died quietly in each of them. For three years now it had been like that for most of them; uplifted rarely and briefly, only to crash again.

But for the sick who had not passed yet, the day was full of anticipation and emotion and excitement; it was a real day. If they passed, they might be sent home any time; they might not have to wait for the end of the war. It was a big stepping stone on the road home, it might change their whole life; if only they passed.

And so, July 6th 1943, was a real day for just a few people at Oflag IX, because once again the Swiss were coming. The camp hospital was spick and span, it was almost unrecognisable, everything that could be polished, was; the floors were scrubbed and the bare boards hardly dry, while the whole place reeked of cleanliness and disinfectant. You felt that nobody could possibly be ill there, they would not dare, and maybe even in the wards the patients were shaved and wearing clean pyjamas. The

camp hospital had suddenly become impressive, and one wondered if the Swiss would realise it was not at all like that usually.

They were due at two o'clock, and long before that the sick who hoped they would pass were assembled in the waiting room, not talking very much, each one at pains to make out that he had not really got a chance; he was not ill, it was all rather a put up job, a good bit of bluff, worth trying on, but quite honestly he had not got a dog's chance, and to pass was the last thing he expected, in fact he knew that he would not, but his doctor had insisted on his trying and that was really the only reason he was there at all. But a good deal of quiet hope pervaded the waiting room. Next door the British doctors were already assembled, with the papers all in order. They were dressed in their best, some even in service dress, so that most of them were unrecognisable too.

They chatted among themselves, each one hoping that his particular patients would get through, partly because of a personal liking and partly because the more patients a doctor could persuade the Swiss to pass, the better for his reputation and his standing in the camp. This was quite a competitive medical occasion and the Royal Army Medical Corps were thoroughly on their toes.

But no one in either room was comfortable or at ease. There was too much spit and polish for a prison camp, it was alien, and everyone felt better when a brown figure, naked except for a pair of dirty home made linen shorts and battered gym shoes, pushed his way into the doctors' room out of sheer curiosity and disbelief. Major the Hon. Hilary St. Clair Edwards, Brigade of Guards, had been sunbathing, and a wasp had stung him, or so he said. But he was out of luck, because no casual patients were being treated on this day of all days, and muttering to himself



he shuffled out, registering shocked and pained surprise. The Major was seldom in touch with camp affairs, and he was one of those very fit men to whom the Swiss medical board meant absolutely nothing. And he was not out to impress anybody either.

The sick in the waiting room smiled a good deal at this incident, and felt better, not physically better, but at home again and in a mood to relax. But they could not relax, because each man there was feeling rather more ill than he usually felt. They were all sick men, and this was their day to be sicker than usual. The sicker the better in the eyes of the Swiss. Of course the really sick, those who had crawled out of bed for the occasion, were feeling like hell anyway and were satisfied. But the periodically sick were all trying to feel worse, and look worse, than they actually were. All were on edge. The heart case in the corner was lighting another cigarette, his eighteenth in succession, because he knew that smoking made him temporarily worse. The man with the stiff leg was sitting at a consciously odd angle on the edge of the bench. He was very lame today. Major Clarke, the elderly Pioneer, unluckily caught in Boulogne three years ago, was wheezing heavily with Asthma; he had slept last night with his head inside his straw pillow; he was pleased with his Asthma and hoped the Swiss would be, too. They were all of them tense and trying. And they sat there for what seemed like hours, and conversation died away to a restless silence while they fidgeted uncomfortably and prayed that something would happen, anything, it did not matter what, so long as it was soon.

Eventually, at 4 o'clock, the door of the doctors' room suddenly opened and the tense lethargy of the sick was broken by the hospital medical orderly, who stood to attention self-consciously as though it was not his habit,

and shouted: "Major Atkinson, this way, sir, please." And Atkinson, who suffered from Rheumatism, rose slowly to his feet and half staggered into the doctors' room, his left hand clasped tight to the small of his back. Atkinson was quite a useful hockey player, but today he was a sick man and looked older than his years.

It only took three minutes, the form was that you stood in front of the table (if you could stand) eyeing the Swiss and looking sick to death, while your British doctor explained your case to the board and gave them your case sheets, and your German hospital reports, if you had any. And while they perused them, you would stand there like a dumb animal, watching; you were a "body", a case, with human attributes almost nil and sometimes they would eventually ask you a question, but very often not. If you passed, they told you so and gave you a ticket. If you failed, they said nothing and you got your ticket afterwards with all the wrong words written on it. So you always knew; but it did seem as though they genuinely felt for you if you failed, and they did try to be tactful. Always the President, a Swiss, would smile at you when it was over and say "Thank you, that is all" and you would walk out of the room thinking they were nice men but just rather foolish. You never hated them till afterwards.

And so it continued; Atkinson went in and out and they told him nothing, and the thirty-eight other sick men followed him in alphabetical order. It soon became obvious that the board was a bad one; that is to say they were too strict and too severe and they only passed the genuine cases; and everybody said it was due to the German, the third of the trio on the board, who was quite determined not to let anyone through, and was being generally rude and bloody and mucking things up in typically German fashion.

But one man, a Captain Smith, who passed, was eagerly cross questioned as to how he had done it; *he* said that the German was solely responsible in his case, even to the point of taking his side in opposition to one of the Swiss. Everyone was fairly surprised to hear this, but, as some one said, old Smith was in a pretty dicky condition and thoroughly deserved to pass anyway; 100 per cent genuine case of Diabetes.

Eventually, there was only one case in the waiting room, a man called Younger, Mark Younger, and I want to tell you about him. He was a young man, about 25, with very black hair and thin, finely drawn features. The sort of man who eats a lot but never gets fat, because he burns up his energy at once and stores none of it. He was a regular soldier, had won an M.C. at Dunkirk before he was captured. He had been wounded in the head, and you could still see the scar, underneath his hair, far down at the back of his head. I never knew him well, but I believe he had tried harder than most of us to escape, and now had given it up. Apparently he was difficult to live with, being intolerant, highly strung, and over emotional. I knew he had been to several hospitals recently, outside the camp, and there had been conflicting reports about him when he came back. Most people said he had gone completely crazy, but one or two seemed to think that perhaps he was better.

After a moment or two the door opened again, and Younger's name was called. He went in. His doctor said nothing about him to the Swiss; he simply handed them Younger's case sheets and waited till they had finished. The Swiss said nothing either; they looked at each other and seemed to nod; they whispered to the German, who also nodded, and it was obvious that all three had reached a general agreement about something. The President

turned to Younger and was about to say something, but Younger interrupted him quickly: "Sir," he said, "I have something to tell you before you reach a decision about me. You have read my case history and no doubt believed it, but I want to say that it is all a fraud, a put-up job. As you can see, I have been wounded, but it did not affect my stability or my reason. I have simply used that wound to try to get home, repatriated as sick. My so-called mental instability is just an act. My 'wild fit of anger amounting to Hysteria', which occurred in a German hospital, that was done deliberately, to impress a doctor who happened to be in the room at the time. I chased a friend round the camp with a knife; that was arranged. I knew that eventually some German would arrest me and that the incident would be reported." Younger was warming to his theme and getting excited but the President interrupted: "Why do you tell me this?" "Well," said Younger, "you see I am a changed man," and he stood straight and his blue eyes glowed as he said it; "yes, a changed man. I have been on the road to Damascus; and I have seen my vision, and am converted. It happened yesterday in the courtyard." He pointed to the window. "You know, over that side it is very beautiful in summer; I like to sit by the wire in the evening and watch the buzzards wheeling and circling against the blue sky and the setting sun. Sometimes I do not feel like a prisoner any more, and it was so yesterday. I seemed to have got very close to something, and suddenly I knew that without God I was nothing, that it was not any use without Him. So I have decided to call in Christ to run my life. I mean to start afresh, on a basis of honesty, sincerity and truthfulness. Something stronger than myself has made me tell you this. I think it is God."

Younger stopped and there was dead silence. The

Senior British Officer, who was present as a matter of formality, looked at his fingernails in silence. The doctors exchanged glances, but nothing was said, and it seemed as though they all agreed in silence. Quietly the President took a white form from the pile in front of him and wrote some words on it in ink. Then he blotted it and handed it to Younger. He smiled kindly and said: "You have been passed for repatriation, you will be sent home as soon as possible."

Younger did not grasp for a moment what had been said, but gradually the full meaning dawned upon him. The anger rose up red into his face, and his eyes clouded. "All of you", he began in a voice of intense bitterness, "all of you think I am mad." And then with an icy scorn: "You are so dead that none of you *can* believe." And he tore up his white form, turned on his heel and left the room. Immediately the door closed, the doctors began to pack up; papers were tidied away, the relevant forms filled in, and tea and English cigarettes were served to all and sundry. It was as though Mark Younger had never been, and it seemed that his case was totally forgotten. But the Senior Medical Officer was an efficient man, and before the Swiss left the camp he persuaded the President to write out another form for Younger, and to give it to him for safe custody. He also made a mental note that Younger would be better off in hospital, where he could keep an eye on him, rather than at large in the camp proper.

Of course the story got around immediately, and became the sensation of Oflag IX. Opinions were divided, however. Some said that Younger had been damn clever and had done a beautiful double bluff on the Swiss; while others maintained that he had gone too far: that the thing was in the bag anyway, they had already agreed to

pass him, and that it was a foolish and unnecessary risk to bring in that bit about God. They were annoyed with him for trying to be too clever, and nearly spoiling not only his own chance, but other people's as well. Also, it was in poor taste.

Younger took an extraordinary line, or so the camp thought. Instead of being pleased at the prospect of going homē he seemed furious. He put on an air of injured innocence and swore he had spoken nothing but the truth.

Of course, this astonished everybody ; whereas the camp had been prepared to admire him for his bluff and the success of his scheme for fooling the Swiss, now they began to be afraid of him ; there was something odd and hostile about his conduct that they did not understand, and when, later on, he was ordered to live permanently in the hospital, everybody agreed that now he really was mad, and said that he had been caught in his own trap ; he had acted madness so well that now he could not stop it : it had become part of him ; like a bad actor, who cannot in real life shake off from his shoulders the part he is playing on the stage. People said it was tragic ; but they were glad, in a small, secret way, that he was paying a price for his cleverness. And when, in October, the amazing happened at last, and an exchange of sick and wounded took place, Younger refused to go ; he said it was dishonest. But he did go ; in the end ; they drugged him ; and the last I saw of him he was being helped out through the gate by two medical orderlies, one on either side. I never heard of him again, but as the camp said, it was tragic ; he had been caught in his own trap. Queerly enough I often think about him, and always he troubles me. You see, I cannot decide.

# Peace is Your Ticket, Charley

by ANTHONY BLOOMFIELD

"PEACE, it's wonderful," shouted the soldier in the corner of the pub suddenly. "Who's going to buy me a pint because it's peace?"

It was a small pub—a beer-house only—on the fringe of the town; it had its few regulars, and lovers from the neighbouring camps used it because the room was dark and quiet. The soldier was a little middle-aged man, with a white dyspeptic face, puffed like an ulcer. He had been drinking pints of bitter since opening time.

"Peace," the soldier said, swaying to where the two young pilots were sitting with two WAAFs. "War collos. *Comprenez-vous?* War finish—mafeesh war any more." He was bending over the table in front of the WAAFs. "I could kiss you now," he said, "Because it's peace and anybody can kiss anybody when it's peace."

The WAAF giggled and her boy friend bought the soldier a pint.

"France, Egypt, Libya, Tripoli, Tunisia," the soldier explained as he drank his beer. "I was with the Eighth Army. Not a white bint for . . . Peace, it's wonderful! The muck they call beer, you wouldn't believe. Not that we ever got any." He swallowed the rest of his beer, and the other pilot ordered him a second pint.

He was clowning a little consciously now, and addressed himself to the prettier of the two WAAF's. "Half a bottle of water a day we had," he went on. "You don't

believe me, do you? Don't believe I was one of Monty's boys?"

"Look," the soldier said, "Look."

He unbuttoned his greatcoat, and stubbed his forefinger on the medal ribbon on his tunic. "Africa Star," he said, "And I didn't get it sitting on my . . . begging your pardon. Right up the blue I was—France, Egypt, Libya, Tripoli, Tunisia."

He drank deeply from his glass and sat silent a moment. "Look," the soldier said, "It's peace, isn't it? War collos. You're a nice girl, nearly young enough to be my daughter."

"I'll give it to you," he said. "What do I want with medals now it's peace? Peace, it's wonderful!" Clumsily, he unfastened the cellophane covered ribbon from his tunic, and handed it to the WAAF.

"I didn't get it sitting on my . . . " The soldier belched steadily. He finished his beer, picked up the glass, and stumbled to the bar.

"I'd give you one, too, if I had another," the soldier said to the barmaid. She was a lymphatic, slatternly girl, with hair like wet corn. "You're a beautiful girl," the soldier said. "You're nearly young enough to be my daughter, too. I'd like to give you one."

He ordered another pint and emptied the glass in one swallow.

"Look," the soldier said, "I'll give you my badge, and you can put it on your beautiful red blouse. Just a present from one of Monty's boys because it's peace."

He grunted with satisfaction, unpinned his cap-badge, and gave it to the barmaid. He went to the door; as he reached the threshold, he turned round and shouted, "Peace, it's wonderful!"

The soldier walked down the main road into the town. He swayed a little, but managed to maintain a fairly steady



progress. Once he went down a side road to relieve himself. His beret was pushed on the back of his head ; he carried his greatcoat flapping over his arm.

He came to the White Hart. The White Hart was the largest hotel in the town. As the soldier pushed his way through the crowd of officers, smartly-dressed girls and affluent civilians, he was a little intimidated.

He ordered his drink quietly, and swallowed deeply. On the stool next to him sat an Army Captain. "It's peace now, mate," the soldier said tentatively. "No more captains, no more privates." The captain remained silent.

"Were you ever one of Monty's boys?" the soldier asked.

The captain moved away.

The soldier was deeply aggrieved. He turned to his other side, to the rich, powdered back of a large blonde woman. The soldier pushed his face over her shoulder and said, "Peace, it's wonderful!" The woman took no notice at all.

"Peace, it's wonderful!" the soldier said again, more loudly. This time the woman, and the men to whom she had been talking, all turned to look at the soldier ; they eyed him coldly for a moment and then resumed their conversation.

The soldier was really angry. "Issma, George," he called loudly to the barman. The barman was a slick dark-haired man, of perhaps the same age as the soldier.

"Why aren't you in uniform, mate?" the soldier said when the barman brought his beer. The barman moved down the bar. "A fine young man like you," the soldier shouted after him, "should be in uniform."

"It's because of smart boys like you that we have to do five years." Jeering at the barman, the soldier recovered his good humour.

"You'd look all right in khaki, you would, mate," the soldier said, as the barman brought him his second beer. He took his beret and pushed it on the barman's head. "Go on, you have it. I don't want it any more now it's peace." The beret slid to the floor.

The soldier sat back on his stool and hummed *Lili Marlene*. He drank another beer, and began slowly to take off his tunic. When the barman was opposite him again, he handed him the tunic over the bar. "There you are, mate," he said, with a grandiloquent wave of his hand. "Now you can be a soldier. Peace it's wonderful! . . . No, you keep it. War finish, war collos. What would I want a tunic for now it's peace, mate?"

The barman gave a hopeless shrug and left the tunic on the bar by the side of the soldier. The soldier finished his beer and went out in his shirt sleeves.

In the road he began to sing *Lili Marlene* loudly. He smiled at everyone he passed. Outside the Public Library, he gave his greatcoat to a decayed old man who was leaning against the wall. "Here you are, mate," the soldier said, "A present from the Eighth Army. The working class has got to stick together now it's peace. Peace, it's wonderful!" he went on, breaking off his singing occasionally to laugh aloud to himself.

They turned him away—quite kindly from the next pub., but the soldier didn't mind. He got in at the "Buldon Arms."

The "Buldon Arms" was one of the town's least respectable taverns; the police watched it carefully. The floor was dirty and stained with smears of spittle and beer. Girls sat in pairs with their backs against the wall opposite the bar. A gang of boys were clustered around the pin-table.

The soldier opened the door and said, "Peace, it's

wonderful! Good evening, everyone." Several of the girls laughed. The soldier was very happy. He sang a chorus of *Lili Marlene* and the girls clapped.

He went to the bar and took the barmaid by the hand. "I was one of the Desert Rats," he said, "And now I've no money, ducks, and I want a pint." The barmaid looked round quickly and drew him a pint of bitter.

"A lovely girl you are," the soldier said. "I was up the blue—France, Egypt, Libya, Tripoli, Tunisia. We never saw a white bint up the blue."

The soldier sat down at a table at which two girls were sitting. They were badly made up, and the paint on their cheeks stood out like a fever flush.

"I'd give you girls a kiss," the soldier said, "Because it's peace and anyone can give anyone a kiss when it's peace." He drank from his glass. "Only you're young enough to be my daughters." The girls looked scornful; they were very young.

"When I went overseas," the soldier said, "you must have been still on your bottles." The girls ignored him.

The soldier sat in thought for a moment, and then began to draw his shirt out of his trousers. "I'm going to give you a present," he said. "I haven't anything else; I'm going to give you my shirt—a shirt from one of Monty's boys."

"Don't mind us, I'm sure," one of the girls said.

The soldier sat still, a hurt expression on his face. The girls began to talk quietly to each other. "All right then, sulk if you must," the soldier said, and he winked: "Peace, it's wonderful!"

He wandered over to the pin-table, glass in hand. "Who'll have a game with an old Desert Rat? Just to celebrate the peace."

A thin flashily-dressed youth accepted him,

"I haven't any money," the soldier said. "I'll play you for a pint against my braces. They're issue braces—went all up the blue with me."

The soldier lost, but the winner bought a pint.

"But you've got to have my braces," the soldier said. It took him a long while to unfasten them. When he finally got them off, the boy had gone. The pub was closing. The soldier threw his braces into a corner.

Outside, his feet began to hurt him. He sat down on the curb and took off his boots. He placed them neatly together by his side; walked away a little, then returned, picked up the boots and put them against the wall. Walking, he had difficulty with his trousers. Twice they tripped him, but he did not hurt himself.

The Red Caps picked him up at the Bus Station. It was one month after the end of the war. Because he was small and not dangerous the Red Caps treated him gently.

"You can't do this to me," the soldier said. "I was one of Monty's boys. And it's peace. War collos. Red Caps collos. It's peace."

The Red Caps dragged him to the pick-up.

The soldier did not struggle, but his trousers had fallen around his ankles. The lance-corporal climbed into the truck and the corporal passed the soldier to him.

"Peace, it's wonderful!" the soldier shouted.

"You'll get your peace, Charley, when you get your ticket," the corporal said, locking the tailboard.

# Dear Son Harold

by G. THURSTON HOPKINS

So here I am, he thought, lying in the sand thinking of London, the sixth of March, nineteen-hundred and twenty-nine, thinking of walking through a London of wet pavements and coloured lights with the last office workers hurrying for their trains and the newspaper men covering with pieces of old sacking what are left of the *News* and *Standards* and puffing cigarettes over their hands as they check up the thick, heavy columns of pennies . . .

He opened his eyes for an instant. Evidently the fighting was not far off. From behind one of the small featureless hills a puff of black smoke crawled up into the air. It was like an immense dark flower growing out of the crest of the hill ; growing and growing against the ice-blue sky and as he watched, the thin trail of smoke, which still attached the enlarging blossom-shaped cloud to the skyline, wavered and commenced to dissolve. A bomb, he thought. But he felt no desire to search overhead for the aircraft which must be there. Curiously unafraid he closed his eyes again so that the bright shape of the sand-hills and the sharp outline of the prickly pear tree, a few yards away, swam momentarily on the red grain screens of his eyelids.

. . . and they are there now, men and women walking the wet pavements ; the newspaper men checking their coppers while here I lie in the sand, waiting for them to come and find me. I read once it didn't hurt ; that

often soldiers had no idea they were wounded but I never really believed this was possible. Truly I wouldn't know I was wounded if I hadn't felt that little bleeding. So it is nothing. I am wounded and I can laugh. No, not too much. Don't take liberties with yourself or God may wipe that smile off your face. Just go easy and think how you were in London in the rain, walking in the rain on the night of the sixth of March, nineteen-hundred and twenty-nine . . .

I always remember the date because that was the night I proposed to Connie which was two days before my birthday and in twenty-nine I came of age. Otherwise I might not remember the date when Harold Cummings walking through London on a wet night asked Constance Anderson to become Mrs. Harold Cummings. That was a pretty big night for me and we stood and kissed in the doorway of an optician's shop in Holborn while the buses and taxis hissed past like ships that pass in the night and the fur of her collar was like a small animal asleep, silently curled about her soft, warm neck. And the little, cheap jewel thing attached to the front of her blouse which caught on my jacket so that we could not separate and I said, "I'm in no hurry, are you?" and she tilted back her head and laughed quietly, so quietly that her laugh was only for you, no-one else in the world but you, standing there in the darkness of the optician's doorway. Always you have remembered how she laughed quietly; it was as wonderful as anything which came after. Now, perhaps at this very moment, somewhere in London, a man is asking his girl to become Mrs. Somebody. That is how the world goes on. A woman says yes, you are born, you come of age, a woman says yes, and nothing is born and here you are lying in the sand wounded by the bullet fired by the son of a woman who said yes. That is life.

Would they send a telegram informing Connie that he had been wounded? He would try to get them to put *slightly* wounded then the shock would not be too great for Connie. Well, at least he wouldn't have his mother to worry about; it was perhaps better that she was no longer alive to sit in her room and wait for Connie to come and tell her her son Harold had been wounded, even if only slightly wounded. To my dear son Harold, she wrote in the front of the pocket Bible which she gave you when, long ago, you first went to boarding school; the Bible you never read but have still, here, in your pocket, unfortunately not near the little bleeding which it might have prevented—as in the last war, bullets lodged in Bibles carried in the breast pocket—you have it still although there never seemed time to read it. I am sorry about this, Mother, because I know you always wanted me to read it and someday I will, from cover to cover, because it is your wish. But I value it. It is my most priceless possession. I want you to know I think it a grand Bible. This may sound absurd when I tell you I have never read it but I am speaking the truth when I say that for me there is no other book in the world even though all I have read are the smutty bits and the Song of Solomon and “To my dear son Harold.” They say the Song of Solomon is great poetry but “To my dear son Harold” is great poetry also. In fact I wouldn't be surprised if it isn't the greatest poem ever written. So please never imagine I would have preferred Shelley or Rupert Brooke. If I could have my life all over again I would want that Bible with you writing inside the cover “To my dear son Harold.” . . .

Once upon a time, many years ago, there was a little boy called dear son Harold . . . I will tell this story to myself until they come and take me to the base hospital

when I will ask them to put into the telegram that I am only *slightly* wounded . . . the bars of the cot stripe the whiteness and sometimes in the darkness there is a faint glow and sometimes there is not. Soft hands hush the crying in the night and it is good to be taken close to the warm haven of your mother's body. There are names you gradually discover ; room and pot and cat and there is laughter and strange sweet tastes at the mouth and sometimes, after much crying in the night there is again the delight and comfort and peace and the soft hands which hush the crying. Soon you are a "big man" and after you have been put to bed you run over the cold floor and stand by the window watching the lighted trains rumble across the iron bridge at the end of the road, which is good, except for the noise, which is bad. So you do not quite know if you like the trains or not. But you watch always and wonder and there comes the day when you stand on another bridge while a train rushes underneath and all around is smoke and smell, which is exciting. The days are long and as you run down the garden to play you feel you are about to live one more little life altogether more wonderful and different to yesterday. Yesterday means nothing, today is everything. There is only the little life of today and when you glance up at the clear sky you feel the immensity of the day stretched taut overhead ; a vast blue assurance of the little life of today . .

Somebody is pointing up at this sky and all along the street the neighbours fling open their windows or collect into little silent groups in the middle of the road and stare up at the sky. Very high are silver specs. There is a droning noise ; then they are gone. They are Taubs. This is war. For the first time you are told, "This is war." When the Taubs come Mother calls you indoors and all the world is very still so that you can hear through



the thin wall which separates your house from the next old Mr. Brockhurst coughing his heart up ; you hear quite clearly the grating of the tram as it rounds the curve at the top of the hill. All the world is very still because this is war. At nights you sleep underneath the stairs because if a bomb fell on the house then it would be alright. Also you hang quilts over the bedroom window. If a shell burst close to the window the quilt would stop the shrapnel. The word shrapnel is familiar to you long before the word, seaside. Father is away at the war. He is overseas and he writes letters and sends home pictures of himself seated outside a dugout and talking to a French soldier. At the end of each letter he writes: I am always thinking of you and our dear son Harold.

But the war is soon over and you go to meet father in London. He is alright except for a little gas in his lungs. Father tells you that if he let the gas out of his lungs all the people sitting in Lyons' Corner House would fall dead. This makes Mother laugh and then it makes her cry. Afterwards Father takes you to Gamages and buys you a marvellous clockwork train and he buys Mother a fur coat and she cries all the way home in the train but it is alright because the war is over.

You go to school and in front is a girl with pigtails. The hair is plaited down, down, and at the end the silk ribbons are like two blue butterflies quivering on her back. When she turns her head you look down at your copybook, although always there is the longing to look also and the desire to speak. Afterwards, when you are alone in the street you think of all the things you would have liked to have said to her and at night, in bed, you remember the silk butterflies on her back and how her white arms curve downwards out of the short, tight sleeves. One day there is a party with many girls and games and for the first

time you kiss. The kiss makes you feel ashamed and you are sick in the garden and have to be taken home early. Then for a long time you do not dare to look at girls because always they are laughing at you for being sick in the garden. You hate them—but you remember the kiss and the silk butterflies on her back.

Sometimes you are bad. It is very terrible when you have been bad and while, all day long, you wait for Father to come home from the City, the day is no longer big and beautiful but small and frightening, pressing close down on you and your badness. There are three people you have learned to fear; God, the Policeman and Father. So when Father walks up the road and you hear his key go into the front door you are afraid to meet him because you know Mother is going to tell him how bad you have been. The shame at the taking down of the trousers is very great. Afterwards there is always forgiveness but for a long time there is the shame at the taking down of the trousers, yes, always the shame was greater than the hurt . . .

That Christmas when Mother gave you *Robinson Crusoe*, lying on the carpet before the gasfire, popping yellow, pink and purple flames, while the snow piled silently, mysteriously against the window panes, reading of the island, green from the entrance of Crusoe's cave. *Robinson Crusoe* smells, only differently to the big volume of *Chums* which was Father's when he was at school. Each time you turn the pages you catch the smell; fusty, dry—yes, like Crusoe's hut might smell or . . . Sometimes you stop reading just to smell. It is *strange*.

It was during a winter of snow that I went to my first real school. There were no girls and instead of the gentle mistresses there were masters who roared and strode up and down between the cold desks and suddenly rapped

your fingers with a ruler. You were made to stand out in front of the class and you were a fool. You hated the masters and it was difficult not to cry. Later there is a master you like and you long to be able to answer all the questions. When he says—holding up your copy book—“Cummings, very good,” you are happy as you have never been before and you strive to do better and better. Outside in the hall a boy is practising on the piano. The deep, sad sounds bring swelling feelings into the chest and tears into the eyes. It is beautiful. You do not know *why* but it is beautiful. It is also very beautiful when, on Wednesday afternoons, the whole class stands and sings, “. . . the rain, it r-a-a-a-ineth every day.” Beautiful when Julius Cæsar says ; “Et tu, Brute?” and Nelson says: “Kiss me, Hardy.” Beautiful the organ in church ; wonderful if you were allowed to press your fingers on the brown keys and pull out all the stops and put your feet on all the pedals so that the place is filled with a thunder which brings a lump into the throat. Beautiful when the priest, in his gold and purple robe, turns and blesses the congregation ; beautiful when the priest chants in Latin and the choir softly answers. Beautiful when you come out of the confessional and kneel for a moment before the altar and then walk outside into the sunshine, feeling *clean*. Almost everything is beautiful and there is a great desire to do only beautiful things . . .

Yes, I always wanted to do only beautiful things, I see that now. I love the beautiful and I wanted to be part of everything which was beautiful. But it was never easy, especially when there came the questioning, the vague awareness of life's complexity. Then often what you had thought beautiful and simple proved not to be beautiful or simple at all. Certainty dwindles to doubt ; the mind which unhesitatingly accepted now questions. You are

amazed at the contradictions of life. You believe in God and you do not ; you love God and you hate God ; everything is against itself divided. Frightened and fascinated by the Mystery of Life you listen to the whisperings of your companions and you question and always there is the contradiction, the evasion of the ultimate explanation. Nothing is simple any more. You fight against the force which drives the mind to wandering where it should not wander ; you cry out to God to save you but God does not hear. And so always there is the wretchedness of wishing to sin which no amount of Hail Marys can wash away. This goes on for a long time. You are filthy, you are damned for ever, you will be flung into the pit of Hell, oozing the slime of mortal sin.

Quite suddenly you learn courage. It is quite easy when you know how. You simply learn not to fear God or the threats of God ; you learn not to be bribed with the promises of God or cowered by the wrath of God. One day you find yourself standing alone, quite alone. Heaven and Hell are no longer destinations waiting your arrival in the future but are now, in yourself this very moment, Heaven and Hell, neighbours in your soul, eternally petitioning for your custom. God stands apart, a vast possibility, hinting at His presence in all things, good and bad.

And so the relief of clean adventure, of camping alongside rivers and squatting over fires at night, frying bread and potatoes in spitting fat and sleeping in the open underneath the stars, with the fire, red embers faintly glowing. The adventure of standing on the grassy floor of an old Norman tower and looking up and seeing there, where the roof once was, a single white cloud passing slowly over the square of blue sky. The adventure of climbing hills and from the top gazing out across the Weald

and thinking; Primitive man stood where I stand and what he saw then was little different to what I see now. The adventure of lying in the shade of trees and puffing at a pipe and talking of *life*. And when the sun goes down the adventure outside the fish and chip shop in the village, the following of the group of girls and the screams and laughter in the darkness of the lane which runs, a leafy tunnel from village to village. Afterwards there is the boasting beside the camp fire, with a mug of brown tea until there are red embers faintly glowing and sleep comes, the fine, clear satisfied sleep of youth. Then the adventure of wet weather; the lashing of the rain upon the tent so you think of a squall at sea and the tent is a boat weathering an ocean of bowed grass while inside you sit, secure, brewing tea and listening with delight to the wind howling through the clumps of oaks and talk and read Stevenson and Ballantyne and Dumas.

After this came the adventure of one night walking in the street with a girl, which was before walking through London on a wet night with Connie, long before that, when there was the misery of trouble in the house and staying out late at nights and being questioned when you went home and lying about where you had been; when there was the misery of secrets being discovered and the anger at not being allowed to live one's own life. You are walking beside this girl, down a street and because she works in a chemist's shop you can smell the odour of anti-septic still clinging to her clothes; you can smell this above the cheap powder and scent she uses; never did she use the powder and scent well; there was always a little indication, a tide mark, where the powder began and ended, but in spite of this she was a grand girl to have for your first. After all these years you can still recall her as rather pathetic, acting the experienced woman of

the world when she was really little more than an overdressed child. Saying good-night for the first time, you wanted to run away and catch the last tram but you stayed, for hours and hours it seemed, close to her antiseptic, cheap scented child-woman's body. That summer, on holiday with her, you sat in a shelter on the sea front with your arm about her waist and every time you kissed there was salt on her lips and always, always, there was the muffled roar of waves breaking on the invisible beach and the dragging hiss of the retreating surf and sometimes the slow, heavy footsteps over the shingle made by pairs of lovers wandering in the salty darkness. All the while you sat kissing there was at the back of your mind the thought that on the far side of the water was France and past France was Italy and beyond Italy was Africa . . .

One day you decide it is time to settle down. So many people keep telling you "time you were settling down, old man" that in the end, one day, you think to yourself, yes, it is time I settled down. It will be good to have a woman of my very own, so I will settle down. So you have a woman of your very own and this is the one walking through London on a wet night and the little animal asleep about her neck and laughing softly in the dark. Perhaps that's all there was of the woman of your very own—just that moment of her laughing softly in the dark. For a time you are very happy; later you are not quite so sure and there is again the questioning and the old longing to lay the fingers on the keyboard of the organ and pull out all the stops or to write something like "Give me the splendid silent sun with all his beams full dazzling", or to paint a masterpiece or compose a fifth symphony or wildly conduct a giant orchestra. But you do not speak of these things to your wife because the laughter of one's wife is a very terrible thing. No, all the

time you are money grubbing and sitting bored at the cinema or having Sunday tea with the Carringtons there flows through your mind, "Give me the splendid silent sun with all his beams full dazzling" and it is like clear, cool water flowing over parched earth or racing underground on a hot dusty day but only to yourself do you think these things, think them while swaying from a strap coming back from the City, think them against a background of "Just one more chance", think them while trying to appear interested in the bleating of Robert Carrington.

About that time you became quite fond of poetry—not all poetry but just a few special poems and sometimes only parts of those, like in *Maud*, that bit about "there has fallen a splendid tear from the passion flower at the gate . . . She is coming, my dove, my dear, she is coming, my love, my fate." But she never did come, this is what you have to admit to yourself. Only Mrs. Harold Cummings came. Maybe she came just once or twice, like when you stood with her that night with the little furry animal asleep about her neck, perhaps that was her, my love, my fate, perhaps that was as long as she ever stayed even for the poet. Perhaps she never really came at all, never comes for any man and that when he thinks she has come it is only because he thinks she has come. Connie came but not my love my fate; Constance Mrs. Harold Cummings who could write in a letter:

. . . last week I decided to have the front room re-papered. I know this was dreadfully extravagant of me but it did look so shabby for people to come into and that old sideboard I sold to a dealer and I am getting in its place a *really smart* little modern piece which I picked up remarkably cheap. Did I tell you that Bob Carrington is now a Squadron Leader? Of course there's no holding Mrs. C. now! But my dear

the uniform does make such a difference, don't you think? I should have thought it would be worth trying for a commission if only for the uniform and it's not as if you couldn't carry it off . . .

Yes, that was Connie. Connie, my love, my fate. All of her. Wallpaper, really smart uniform, Connie. There wasn't any more of her. Connie the city typist, pretender to the throne of suburbia. Connie saying irritably: "Switch off that old rubbish, Hal. I don't know *what* the B.B.C. is coming to these days. It's enough to depress *anyone*." And you saying, "Yes, but Connie I feel we should sometimes try to listen to these things, try to understand what is going on. It affects us all . . . now this business of fascism—Good Lord! I know practically nothing about it and I realise I *should*. We both should. And this blighter in Germany—there's a war coming Connie. Oh yes, you can smile. You think because—yes, I've locked the back door and I've only to put on my coat. Well, we didn't say we would be at the Carringtons' until after three, did we? You see if Germany—yes, I have the key . . ."

That was how it was with Connie and yourself. You talked while she patted her hair before a mirror and said, "Mmm?" and fumbled inside her handbag and wondered if after all she shouldn't have put on her light blue costume.

Then WAR. Impossible, hideous, inevitable, catastrophe!

Don't worry, chum. If it fits, you're deformed! Salute when you meet an officer! Lift up your feet there! Look to your dressing there! You're like a lot of pregnant chorus girls. Let me see those arms SWING! Walk up, salute, grab your money and get out! Claw out his eyes, *see*! Kick him where it hurts most; you know



where that is DON'T YOU? Right in the belly. In, twist, out! Yawning in a barren lecture room you stare at a crudely painted landscape, dismally pinned to the wall. The lecturer says: "An' now I'm goin' to show you 'ow an army hadvances . . ." It is like being back at school. You scribble on the desk top or read a book open on your knees.

Troopship. Clyde. Hooting of tugs. Gulls screeching.

Standing in the bows of the great vessel you gaze out over the grey expanse of water to where the hills, although half hidden by a fine rain, are still green. Wonderful, exciting, terrible moment. Life is ghastly, you think, but the *beauty* of it. Even the black minutes, the beauty of them; the poignant, heart-breaking beauty of the Clyde with its green hills and grey ships at anchor and the hooting of the tugs and the screeching of the gulls. You think of England and you, who for many years have not allowed yourself the weakness of prayer, you pray. You cannot help praying; it is wrung out of you. Oh, England, my England is what you pray. And when you looked about you at the faces of the other men you thought the ears of God must be burning for the Clyde was full of prayers that morning.

It seemed he had lain quite still for a long time thinking these things. A feeling of acute sadness stole over him for suddenly he knew what was happening; his whole past was slowly draining out of him, drop by drop. And yet, for some reason, he was satisfied. Examining this past he knew he should feel angry. But he was not angry; all he wanted to do was tell the world something. He desired to speak to the world as a kindly father would speak to a difficult son. He had a message for the world if only he could make himself heard. But he was worried by a most absurd idea that he had crawled to the world's edge, that

he was hesitating on the extreme verge, pausing a moment before gently launching out into the illimitable space. His fingers dug down into the sand, now smooth as evening velvet, as if to prevent himself—strangely disturbing thought—from slipping back into the past he had so long meditated. All he wanted to do was speak to the world while there was yet time; but time was rushing past, screaming in his ears, laying a wall of sound between himself and the world, so that, when he opened his mouth he knew it was useless, he would not be heard.

Once more he opened his eyes; his eyelids were like heavy steel shutters, very stiff and ready to slide down again immediately he released control of them. He fancied men were approaching down the road but he could not be sure. A lizard, travelling at an amazing speed and holding its tail aloft whipped across the ground, its dark shadow underneath clear on the colourless ground. There were many flies on his face and those climbing over his nose were giants whose feet he did not feel. Only when they explored the opening of his dry mouth did he weakly endeavour to eject them.

Then he saw the puff of black smoke rising above one of the small hills. Queer, he thought, that happened before . . . just like this. An immense dark flower growing into the sky, unfolding, something to do with wet pavements in London and the newspaper men covering . . .

He was thinking again; thinking of himself, that wonderful defeated atom, dear son Harold, the poem that was him, lost to the world forever, unrecognised, joining space and the unknown and he did not hear the detonation of the bomb exploding behind the small hill, the very first bomb to be dropped out of the sky that afternoon.

# The Empty Sky

by BENEDICT THIELEN

He awoke and with his eyes still only half open waited for the men around him, the humps under the khaki blankets, to materialise out of the darkness, stir, stretch, and yawn. He waited for the thump of heavy shoes on the duckboards outside the windows, the creak of the opening door and the voice calling, quiet at first, then sharp-edged and metallic, the insistent wedge prying them up out of sleep. Outside, through the misty air of the early morning, would come the distant hot cough, sputter, choke, then catch, roar, and soon steady droning of the first planes being warmed up.

But now as the film of sleep cleared from his eyes he saw that it was already beginning to get light. The air that came in at the open window was warm and the sky beyond was clear. As he looked at it the sky seemed to expand and become limitless. Then the deep indrawn breath, the ocean-surge of freedom came upon him and he knew that this was the morning for which he had been waiting, for which they were all waiting. This was the dreamt-of moment become real, the waking on the first morning of a day of summer, at home.

He let the sense of solitude, the strange feeling of being alone in a room, surround him. He listened to the silence and heard the absence of others' breathing, their restlessness, turning in sleep, and sometimes their sharp sudden cries. He breathed deeply and smelt the dry fragrance of

fresh grass instead of the smell of damp khaki wool, leather, and gasoline. As he watched the day come slowly through the window he felt the ordered rhythm, the ebb and flow of daylight and dark, of all the days of the future.

Birds began to sing. As the sun rose and the early breeze began the leaves of the trees made moving shadows on the ceiling above his bed. The daylight flowed across the window sill. It moulded the shapes of the furniture, drew the walls out of the darkness and lined them with its warmth. Once he heard the distant hum of a plane and for an instant he saw himself up there in the sky. But then the picture faded and he felt only the warmth and safety of the quiet earth.

He put his arms behind his head and looked up at the ceiling. He heard the sounds of beginning life, a car in the street, a broom on the pavement, the whistle of a train, a voice calling, a door opening, footsteps on the stairs, the day ripening.

The door opened and his mother came in with his breakfast on a tray.

He sat up in bed and said, "This is like the pictures you see in the ads. They always have some guy getting his breakfast served to him in bed."

"Well, I should hope so," his mother said. "Your first morning home."

"Nothing's too good for our soldier boys," he said, and took a drink of orange juice.

"What, dear?" His mother took a step back from the bed and looked down at him. "Did you sleep well, George?"

He nodded his head. She continued looking at him.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Do I look funny?"

"Of course not," she said. "I just haven't had a good look at you yet. It was so late when you got in."

"Oh, yes. That train certainly was late."

He dipped a roll in his coffee.

"Goodness, George," his mother said. "Is that what you learned to do in the Army?"

"Air Corps. Sure, it goes down faster."

"You always ate so fast. Much too fast, George, it's not good for you."

He laughed and said, "I seem to be alive still."

His mother looked worried and said, "George, how do you feel? I mean does it hurt . . . where you . . . you were hurt?"

The distress that came into her face made it look suddenly old and pale and involuntarily he touched his leg for a second with a feeling of pain. For some reason he thought of their kitchen. He saw it, the sun streaming in the window on the checked linoleum tablecloth lighting the razor edge of a cabbage shredder and the blood dripping down from his finger on to the red and white tablecloth and his mother's face in the doorway, frozen in grey horror. He saw the vicious sharp edge of the shredder and the black puffs of flak below and the yellowish-white plexiglass of the B-25's nose, with the sun overhead warm on his neck and shoulders, and then the crash and rush of the icy air driving against him, driving the black jagged fragment of metal into his side. He felt the ship rocking and plunging and the hands grasping him under the arms, dragging him back through the crawlway, and the trail of his blood warm and sticky along the cold square metal tunnel.

"What is it, George? Oh, dear, I shouldn't have said anything, should I, but naturally I worry so and . . ."

"What's all this secret conflagration going on in here?" His father stuck his head around the half open door, then came in and leaned against the door jamb.

"Well, how does it seem?" He looked around the room. "But you don't have to tell me. Why, it seems only yesterday that I . . ." He shook his head. "This is one day you'll always remember."

For a few seconds none of them said anything, looking at each other and smiling.

His father started humming, then frowned and stopped.

"There was a song . . . funny, I can't think how it goes now, but we all used to . . . it ends up 'and never get up any more.'"

"I remember," his mother said. "You used to sing it."

His father started to hum again, "And never get up any more . . . Funny, I never thought I'd forget that."

He looked down at the blouse hanging over the back of a chair.

"Well, you certainly got yourself some ribbons, George."

His mother looked over at them and said, "You'll have to explain to me what they all are, George."

"That first one's the Purple Heart," his father said and they both turned and looked at him with a kind of worried pride in their faces.

"We didn't have so many decorations in the last war," his father said. "It's hard to keep up with all these new ones."

"They just hand them out, George said. "It doesn't mean anything."

"Now, now," his father said. "No false modesty."

"Remember?" his mother said. "All the badges George won when he was in the Boy Scouts? What did they call them, George, merit badges?"

He looked at his father and burst out laughing. His father laughed too and for a few seconds they both looked at his mother, laughing, while she looked from one to the other in a half smiling confusion.

"Well, I don't see what's so funny about that," she said. "I'm sure we were all very proud of you."

"But I never got to be an Eagle Scout."

He started to laugh again. He looked from one to the other of them, feeling his head moving back and forth, laughing, and suddenly seeing Andy, the tail-gunner, laughing and laughing, and the ambulance carrying him off, the sound of his laughter still trailing behind it like a thin violently fluttering ribbon jerking and twisting out of the back of the ambulance, even when the ambulance was far down the field, and all of them standing there avoiding each other's eyes.

He picked up the napkin and held it against his mouth and coughed, then put it down and, smiling, said quietly, "I don't know, it just struck me funny."

His mother sighed and said, "George, sometimes you get the funniest ideas."

His father put his arm around her shoulders and said, "That's because he's got such a funny mother."

"You both make such fun of me," she said. "George, what would you like for lunch? Is there anything particular you'd like?"

His father said, "I thought maybe George would like to come downtown later on and have lunch with me at the club. I thought he might want to sort of look around and . . ."

He paused and they both stood there looking down at him, both half smiling and looking somehow very much alike.

"Well," he said, "I don't know, Pop. Thanks a lot but . . ."

"Of course everybody's waiting to see you," his father said. "When I told them you were coming they all . . ."

He saw the town and all the people hurrying through

the streets and the traffic and the people at the club and all the hands held out to shake his own and all the smiling friendly faces. Something inside him drew back and shrank and he saw the slow unfolding of the land below and the soft clouds streaming by. He felt the gentle rise and fall of the ship and the steady beat of the engines. He heard the silence of the roaring engines, the serenity and quiet of the deafening clatter, the steady breathing of the air coming in through the round vanes of the ventilator. There was the shining disk of the prop, the drops of moisture on the wing, hanging like jewels on the edge, trembling, then sliding and suddenly flying off into the high deep blue air, above, below, and on all sides.

"I thought maybe I'd just sort of stick around here," he said.

He thought he saw just the shadow of disappointment cross his father's face and added quickly, "Of course I want to do that real soon."

"Why, that's all right, George," his father said. "I thought if you just happened to feel like it, why . . ."

"After that awful trip," his mother said.

"Well . . ." His father looked at his watch. "Gosh! Why, say it's almost nine o'clock. They'll wonder what's happened to me."

"Say hello to everybody," George said. "And tell them . . ." He stopped, feeling confused. "Tell them . . ." A wordless blankness seemed to fall across his mind. "Say that . . ."

"Well, I'll be going," his father said. "Take it easy, son."

As he went out of the room his mother leaned around the door and called to him, "Be sure and don't forget the ice cream, Fred."

She turned back to him and said, "I read in the paper



that the one thing you all want most when you get back home is ice cream."

"That's right," he said. "That'll be great."

"I asked a few people, George. Just Aunt Margaret and Uncle Phil and . . ."

"Oh!"

"You don't mind, do you? I mean they're all so anxious to see you and they'd feel hurt if I didn't."

"Why, no," he said. "No, that's fine."

"They're both so anxious to see you." She looked around the room, then back at him. "We left your room just as it was. We thought . . ."

He laughed and said, "You'd think I was dead or some thing."

"Oh, George, what an awful thing to say!"

"No, I mean . . . I was just fooling, Mom. I mean it looks fine. It looks swell. Same old place and . . ."

He looked around the room at the brown oatmeal-paper walls, the school pictures, the football team and the graduation picture, the picture of the girl on the bureau.

He laughed and said, "You even left Peggy, I see."

His mother looked surprised and said, "Well, I should think so. After all, everybody always assumed . . . I mean we all somehow felt that you and Peggy were really sort of engaged and . . ."

He heard, with a kind of mild inner surprise, his voice rising and sounding loud in the room, "I don't know whatever gave you that idea. I'm sure I never said anything . . . I mean . . ."

He stopped, seeing the hurt look on his mother's face and then the puzzled look and then the smooth carefully placed expression of patience and the kindness in her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Mom. I don't know, I guess I . . ."

"I know, dear, you're still nervous. Naturally. After that terrible . . . " The tears came into her eyes as she looked at him and he closed his own eyes to shut them out. "And you're so young still, George, you . . . "

He opened his eyes and smiled at her.

"I'm not so damn young."

She shook her head and said, "Yes, you are. You don't realise it perhaps and I know that after all you've been through . . . Oh, George, I used to think of you so often when one of those planes went by. I'd think of you way up there, all alone, and . . . "

She was standing by the side of the bed now and he reached over and took her hand and held it.

"I wasn't alone," he said.

She looked down at him and he squeezed her hand.

"Now you'd better let me get up," he said.

"Don't you want to rest a little longer? I should think . . . "

"No, I feel like getting up. I want to look around."

But when she had gone he did not get up immediately. He lay there propped on one elbow, looking over at the pictures on the opposite wall. Although his face was only a small light dot among other dots he remembered exactly where he had stood when the pictures were taken and he could see himself at this distance. He could see no features and looking at his face was like looking through the wrong end of a telescope that is slightly out of focus. The object was there but it was blurred and without meaning. There was a small round dot which was named George. Around it were other dots named Frank, and Clarence, and Ruth, and Betty. He had once known them all. Each was a person. And there were those others, whose pictures were not here on his walls, but whose faces he could now see far more clearly in his mind. There

was Mac, the pilot, and Charlie, the co-pilot, and Angelo, the mech. crouching down under the wing with the red-painted megaphone-shaped fire extinguisher while they warmed up the engines, and Andy, the tail-gunner, and Andy's laughter trailing down the field behind the ambulance, and all of them standing there listening. But that was not all. There were all those others. There were the boys from the 'Beautiful Baby,' one of whose wings just seemed to fold over very slowly, as if a hand was creasing a triangle of paper, and the way the ship slipped and then shot down, turning over and over, the black smoke pouring out of her and just one 'chute opening before the plane disappeared, and you often wondered who was the one in the 'chute, Mike or Harry or Eddie or the big red-headed sergeant who was named Percy. But that was not all.

He got out of bed and went over to the graduation picture and looked at himself standing there. Then he looked in the mirror and stood there for some time before he put on his bathrobe and went down the hall to the bathroom.

When he came downstairs his mother was running the vacuum cleaner over the rug in the living room. 'The radio was playing and a woman's voice was sobbing, "Oh, I know if he understood he'd come back. I know he can't love her. Oh, don't you see . . ."

He saw his mother pause in front of the radio, listening. Then she turned and saw him standing at the foot of the stairs. Her face lighted up and she turned off the vacuum cleaner and came over to him. Now a man's voice, raised in anger, came out of the radio and the man's voice and the woman's voice wove back and forth in anger and pleading as his mother looked at him, standing there dressed in an old pair of grey flannel trousers, sneakers,

and a white shirt open at the neck with the sleeves rolled up.

"Oh, George, it's so nice to see you like that again. Doesn't it feel wonderful? Of course your uniform's awfully becoming but . . ."

He nodded and looked down at the shirt and trousers.

"It feels awfully queer," he said, "I don't know, I feel sort of undressed."

She took his arm and they walked across the room to the fireplace.

The cold masculine hard voice came from the radio, "I should think it would be perfectly obvious." Then a child called, "Daddy, daddy!"

He looked over his mother's shoulder at the radio and she said, "Oh, it's one of those plays. I suppose they're silly but it makes the time pass when you have housework to do. You don't mind, do you, George? It doesn't make you nervous?"

"No," he said. "Why should it?"

"It's really quite interesting," she said. "You know, it's funny, you get so after a while that those people seem almost like real people to you."

A woman's voice said, "Daddy's just gone away for a while, darling." Tears filled it. "He . . . he'll be back soon."

"That's Helen," his mother said. "Helen Page. Her husband thinks . . ."

The man's voice cut in again, hard, cold, and brutal.

His mother frowned and said, "That's George. George Prentice. He's supposed to be her husband's best friend but what he's really trying to do is . . ."

He laughed and said, "George sounds like a stinker, all right."

"What an awful word, dear! Now what do you want to do, George? Do you feel like . . ."

Her eyes moved around the room until they came to the radio. He felt her listening.

"I guess I'll go out and look at the garden," he said.

"What, dear?" She looked up, smiling. "Why yes, that would be nice. Why don't you do that?"

He went over to the side door that opened on the garden. Sunlight was coming in and the curtains moved slightly in the warm air. He heard the vacuum cleaner start again. The voices kept coming out of the radio.

He walked around the garden. It seemed little changed. A telephone rang in the house next door. He heard a woman's voice say irritably, "No, you've got the wrong number." On the sidewalk a little girl with a lollipop in her mouth was pushing herself along on one roller skate. The sun was warm and small white clouds sailed eastward in the sky. His mother called to him from the house. They had lunch. It seemed queer to be having lunch there. It made him think of Saturdays when he was still at school. He drank two glasses of milk. After lunch he lay down on the couch and read the paper. His mother went downtown to do some shopping. After she had gone he got up and walked around the room a few times. The house was very quiet. He went outside again. In the yard next door some chickens were clucking and now and then letting out plaintive cooing sounds. He stood there for a while listening to them. A yellow butterfly fluttered past his head, erratically, as if staggering on the air. He looked at his watch. It was three o'clock. He went back into the house and started to read a book called "Problems of the Post-War World." After a time he closed it and went upstairs to his room. He lay down on the bed and presently fell asleep. He was

awakened by his mother knocking on the door. He called to her to come in.

She opened the door and said, "Did you have a nice long nap?"

He yawned and said, "I guess I must have. What time is it?"

"It's almost six. You'd better get dressed, dear."

He sat up on the edge of the bed and yawned again.

"Is that blue suit of mine around?" he asked.

"Oh, wear your uniform, George," she said. "They'll all want to see you in it."

"Oh, I thought I'd . . ."

"They'd be so disappointed," she said. "Peggy would be so disappointed if you didn't wear it."

He looked up quickly.

"Peggy?"

"Why, yes, didn't I tell you? She's coming too. Just she and Aunt Margaret and . . ."

"No, you didn't tell me," he said.

"Well!" She looked around the room, then smiled down at him. "I thought I had. Well, you'd better get ready, dear. They'll be here soon now."

He was just tying his tie when the doorbell rang and the room below was filled with voices. He put on his blouse and went to the door. He stood there with his hand on the knob, hearing the voices from below. Once there had been a school play and he had stood there at the door, knowing that in one minute he had to go on the stage. He felt his heart beating faster and the palms of his hands becoming damp. He jerked the door open and walked quickly down the hall and down the stairs.

The voices all suddenly stopped and the faces below looked up at him. Then the voices broke over him like a wave and the faces lighted up and came forward as he

came into the room. They crowded around him and beat against him and then all abruptly receded. The voices stopped and a kind of greasy silence took their place as the heads all turned toward Peggy, then back toward him, smiling, then turned slowly back to her. He shook hands with Uncle Phil and Aunt Margaret. He went over to Peggy, hesitated, then shook hands with her. She looked pretty and soft and young, with blond gently waved hair and blue eyes.

His father came in carrying a tray of cocktails.

"Just look at all those medals!" Aunt Margaret said. "Just to think of George . . ."

Uncle Phil leaned a little forward and, knowingly, said, "That's the Air Medal, with three oak leaf clusters."

They all stared at him. A voice on the radio, which he had not noticed before, said, ". . . by the miracle of electronics, for the post-war home."

Peggy smiled at him and he suddenly recognised his fraternity pin that she was wearing. There were the two black enamel parts, with gold letters, connected by a little chain. He thought of the graduation picture upstairs.

". . . limited to patrol actions," the radio voice said.

"George is probably sick and tired of the war," some one said, and the radio was snapped off.

"I guess we're all sick and tired of the war," Uncle Phil said.

His father poured out a second cocktail. It felt warm and pleasant inside. He looked around at them and smiled.

"Steak!" Uncle Phil said as they sat down. "The fatted steak for the prodigal son."

Everybody laughed. The voices laced the good steak-smelling air with cheerful sound.

"Red points . . . electronics . . . a new refrigerator . . . a

new car . . . red points . . . a new radio . . . black market . . . George . . . electronics . . . post-war economy . . . government interference . . . business . . . prosperity . . . steak . . . wages . . . a new radio."

Peggy smiled at him and lowered her eyes.

"Well, what are your plans, George?" Uncle Phil said and they all stopped eating and stared at him.

He felt himself blushing "Why, I'm not sure yet. I haven't really . . ."

"We want him to get a good long rest first," his mother said.

Steak, French-fried potatoes, peas, alligator pear salad.

". . . the entire price-structure," Uncle Phil said.

George looked down at the white table cloth and for a second saw that other big pine table and all the money, the wallets, the keys, the frayed edged photographs that they dumped there, emptying their pockets before they went on a mission, and the dark morning outside, the dark air throbbing.

". . . economic chaos," Uncle Phil said.

"A penny for your thoughts, George," Aunt Margaret said and glanced at Peggy with a smile.

"Well, anyhow," Uncle Phil said, "you can always turn him off. That's one good thing about the radio: if you don't like what you're hearing all you have to do is turn it off."

George smiled and said, "Why, nothing. Nothing in particular. I was just thinking how nice this is. All this . . ."

Fresh peach ice-cream. Coffee or Sanka?

Later, he walked the two blocks to her house with Peggy. There was moonlight in the spaces between the street lamps. The moon was almost full and directly overhead. The street was quiet.



They stood on the shadowed porch. The moonlight coming through some vines at the edge of the porch wavered at their feet. This was the thing they used to think of. He kissed her. The air smelt of freshly cut grass and clean blond hair. This was what they all wanted.

When he came back his father was sitting in the living room and his mother was clearing things away in the kitchen. His father smiled up at him and said, "I thought you might like a little highball before going to bed."

"That's fine. That's just what I feel like," he said and poured a drink.

The light clicked out in the kitchen and his mother came in. She stood for a few moments looking at them, then leaned down and kissed him and said, "I think I'll go up now. Don't stay up too late."

After she had gone they said nothing for a while, then his father cleared his throat and said, "I thought maybe, George, perhaps it would be nice if we took a couple of days off and went fishing. It might be sort of a nice change for you and . . ."

"Yes, I think that would be fine. Let's do that."

His father looked down into his glass, then back at him. He looked suddenly shy and awkward.

"I now how it is . . . I mean, of course I never got overseas but even so . . . I mean it takes a little time . . . to get readjusted and all . . . at first. But after a while, George, you'll forget all about it." He laughed. "Why, I never thought I'd forget that song . . . you remember, this morning, ' . . . and never get up any more,' but there I can't for the life of me remember. And you're so young still."

He finished his drink and got up.

"You about ready?" He turned off the table lamp, locked the front door, and they went towards the stairs. He stopped with his hand on the banister. "You wouldn't think so, but you forget all sorts of things. Things you once thought . . . In life, I mean." He gave a short embarrassed laugh. "Well, we'll do that. We'll go fishing."

Then, when he was in bed again, he watched the leaf-shadows wavering on the bed as they had moved on the ceiling this morning. But now the light was cold. The warmth of the day was gone and a damp chilliness rose from the ground outside the window. When he closed his eyes heard the voices of the people who had been there that evening, loud but somehow unreal, and the words coming out of the radio, the metallic artificial voices moving in a kind of strident dream world, like the cackling and cooing of the chickens in the yard next door, speaking in an unfamiliar tongue.

He looked up at the ceiling. He felt wide awake. The clock downstairs struck. The street outside was quiet. There was only a faint chirping of crickets in the yard below. After a time he felt himself slowly beginning to fall asleep.

Then he saw the moonlight shining through the ship's nose. He felt the firm support of the leather cushion at his back and saw the needles of the instruments at his left, the airspeed, altitude and course indicators, wavering slowly back and forth. Above them was the red handle of the escape hatch. On his right were the light green ammunition boxes with the red and white dotted loading diagrams clear in the moonlight. The deep night was over, below, and all around them, and the great quiet of the engines was unbroken as the ship sailed through the sky.

He opened his eyes and heard it. He heard the distant throbbing of the plane. He knew this sound. It was not one of the transports that passed from time to time during the day. There was no mistaking it. He jumped out of bed and to the open window. He saw the port and starboard lights and felt the steady forward motion. He saw the men in the darkened ship, crouched among the maze of wires, in the cold metal, in the bright sky. He saw each man and all the men together. He heard the occasional crackle of their voices on the interphone, the jokes and the abuse, each man alone and each man bound by this slender thread to every other man, able to talk and knowing he would be understood.

He sat on the bed and watched the lights until they disappeared and listened to the fading sound until it too disappeared. For a time longer he sat at the window looking up at the empty sky. Then he went back to bed.

4  
“LONELY AS ANGELS”

(Poetry Supplement)



## POETRY IS HAPPINESS

(FOR NICHOLAS MOORE)

by WREY GARDINER

Poetry is happiness, and happiness is the shadow of  
poetry

Like the shape of Orion in the midnight sky  
Spread across the darkening and dreadful future  
Like the cold icicle, pure as our merciless nature.

I am the idiot lost on a winter's morning  
Bedevilled by despair of the ancient works of man  
Ink on my fingers and murder in my heart  
Lonely as angels or the ghost of time.

Love is my happiness and love my learning,  
Words are my undiluted wisdom, not hard my  
meaning,  
Clear as the unseen blackbird singing alone,  
Poetry is life and life lies lazy in the sun.

## THE CLIMATE OF WAR

by KENNETH PATCHEN

Therefore the constant powers do not lessen;  
Nor is the property of the spirit scattered  
On the cold hills of these events.  
Through what is heavy into what is only light,  
Man accumulates his original mastery  
—Which is to be one with that gentle substance  
Out of which the flowers take breath.

That which is given in birth  
Is taken to purer beginnings.  
The combats of this world  
Rise only upward, since death  
Is not man's creature, but God's . . .  
And he can gain nothing by manipulating  
That which is already hidden in himself.  
The sources of nature are not concerned  
In peoples or in battlefields; or are they mindful  
Of the intensity with which man extinguishes his  
kind.

He who can give light to the hidden  
May alone speak of victories.  
He who can come to his own formulation  
Shall be found to assume mastery  
Over the roads which lead  
On the whole human event.

The hour of love and dignity and peace  
Is surely not dead.  
With more splendour than these sombre lives  
The gates within us  
Open on the brilliant gardens of the sun.  
Then do these inscrutable soldiers rise upward,  
Nourished and flowering  
On the battleslopes of the Unseen. For Victory,  
Unlike the sponsored madness in these undertakings,  
Is not diminished by what is mortal ; but on its peaks  
Grows until the dark caverns are alight  
With the ordained radiance of all mankind.

## IS IT PEACE?

by ALAN ROOK

Now is the summer season of the heart:  
now the season of memory; quivering nerves  
quieten and guns are silent now. Our hurt  
was sharp, not mortal. Let our childhood's waves

flood through our peaceful estuaries, the song  
of broken fingers and the sobbing blood  
shine through our groves and forests. Let our long  
agony lighten, mortal cacophony fade.

But let nothing that we have known destroy the vision  
or seen obscure the image of trees we hold  
heart-close for comfort; nothing that we inherit

involuntarily spoil, or to derision  
bring our Arden where there sing clear-eyed  
the sharp-tongued birds of our adventurous spirit.

## POEM

by CHARLES LAMBERT

Don't come tonight, for my door is fast shut  
And my threshold too high for your weighted steps.  
My lodging too far, my room a sealed hut,  
I fear making mischief. Don't come tonight.

Don't come tonight. My soul is tired and sad,  
Heart, with hair whitened, goes robed in black.  
Shadow-caught, cold silence makes me glad—  
You must never disturb them. Don't come tonight.



Don't come tonight. My shelter is hidden.  
And alone, the need is for me to remember.  
Lamplight now would be crude and unbidden,  
So don't come tonight. I am shut in forever.

*(Translated by ELIZABETH BERRIDGE)*

## POEM

by ROGER de LANNAY

The night prowls with soaked paces: the wind rises:  
The glaring lamp is violently reflected by the documents:  
The stove roars dully and in the straw,  
Huddled together against the cold; the men sprawl.

Shall we move on during this night of confusion  
Or shall we pass the winter here, waiting?  
The sleeping village does not wait for Last Post,  
The final tram of the day long since has hooted.

No one speaks: no song comes from the radios.  
Tired men, beyond our frontier  
Fight gloomily. And we, mounting guard;  
Wait to be conducted to the charnel house.

Shall we move tonight or shall we wait all winter?  
Horace, open, is beside me but I have neither power  
Nor courage to re-read his lines this evening;  
My pipe, long cold; has spoiled the memory.

*(Translated by JACK AISTROP)*

# A MAN FREED FROM A DEATH CAMP

by PROSPERE de DYAULTERGEN

I want to see you again so urgently  
That I become weak with the longing.  
But not tomorrow or after tomorrow:  
Give me a week or a month or a year  
To become once more myself.

It is too much  
To find myself  
Able to say "I will go to them today".  
It is too big a thing.

I will come when the mud sucks in the lanes  
And the trees are gaunt and evil.  
I will find you again when  
The azaleas are brittle sticks  
And the dead arms of copper beech a mockery.

Give me a week  
Or a month.  
Even a year before I return.  
Pity my despair.

And when I come do not think me  
Changed. Do not remark it.  
Pretend I am a stranger  
Seen for the first time.  
Give me your hand and bid me enter.

*(Translated by JACK AISTROP)*

## THE NEW PEOPLE

by MICHEL de SMET

Do not delay the coming  
of those who risk their steps  
in this strange light  
and never retrace them.

It is the business of the day,  
of yesterday or the day before,  
to begin again a life  
of slow dimension.

Prayer for meandering knowledge  
and idle words  
brought back to their rank  
by badges of help.

White lights of evening  
faded for the eyes  
yet ready to move the night  
into locked coffers.

*(Translated by PATRICIA LEDWARD)*

## GIGHA

by W. S. GRAHAM

That firewood pale with salt and burning green  
Outfloats its men who waved with a sound of drowning  
Their salt-cut hands over mazes of this rough bay.  
Quietly this morning beside the subsided herds  
Of water I walk. The children wade the shallows.  
The sun with long legs wades into the sea.

## VOICES AT MIDNIGHT

by RICHARD GOODMAN

Both winter's diamond and the summer's gold  
command the heart's allegiance, while the mind,  
more abstract and mathematical, can find  
its unique beauty only in the cold  
geometry of frost, cusped moon and high  
vectors of wind which skew the stars and race,  
across this whorl and solitude of space,  
arrows of crying birds that haunt the sky.

But the heart intervenes. This midnight, blown  
voices from Europe, violent for bread,  
scream at me and, with eyes of strangled light,  
the faces of her dying and her dead  
condemn this crystal of the mind's delight—  
faces of fragile children like our own.

## COMFORT ME NOW, MY LOVE :

*a poem for returning*

by S. D. TREMAYNE

Comfort me now, my love, for what I hoped  
Drags at my backward heart its heaviness.  
The sky forgives no wings their weariness ;  
The faltering dove has gained no rock to rest.  
And I have fears that man is loneliness,  
Is lust and loneliness that drapes with dreams  
His death's too pitiful ungainliness  
And falls with his illusions. Oh my darling,  
Be near me in this callous spring's unfurling,  
Teach me that last year's bird and last year's bomb  
Plunged down in a distant land beyond our time  
And love keeps faith to pay the debt of living.  
Pluck from my heart, too small to hold the world,  
This love in-driven deep, a thorn of grieving,  
And take it, only take it, for your own :  
Train it to grow a garland of forgiving  
Nursed by your hands from this unkindly soil.  
Oh take it all, and take and take it all,  
That it may grow in richness of its giving.  
The wolf of self destroys, the wolf is poised  
To tear my human likeness to the stone,  
The wolf of love denied, the wolf of evil  
That strips the heart's nobility and levels  
Our will to what we are. And I am small,  
So small and frail of fear and bitterness.  
Do not abandon me to my own likeness.

Bear with me now, my love, for what I hope  
Is farther than my spirit's lonely reach,  
Yet at your finger's touch my heart may catch,  
As raindrops catch the light, a gentleness.

# THE WOE-WATERS\*

by JOCELYN BROOKE

The woe-waters foretold  
This troubled Spring, and I  
Have sat by the waters at sundown  
Beneath the cold green sky.

And have seen the sadness of waters  
And heard the crying of wind,  
And wondered that this loved country  
Seemed suddenly unkind.

I have seen the humped woodland  
High beyond Womenswold,  
And the line of the downs like plain chant,  
So solemn and so old.

I have seen the darkling yew-trees  
Follow the arching field  
By Teazel-wood and Gorsley—  
And, suddenly revealed,

Bright on the sharpening sky-line,  
The white, tree-muffled tower  
Guarding the sleeping soldier,  
Tomb of the vanquished power.

\*Woe-Waters: In several places in East Kent certain subterranean springs, rising at irregular intervals, are known by this name; Their appearance is said to herald disaster.

And sitting by the sad waters,  
Feeling this land unkind,  
I have heard the amorous bugles  
Borne on the rising wind.

And have seen the soldiers crossing  
The downs by Womenswold,  
And have known at last what sorrow  
The woe-waters foretold.

THE END







■

## AIDE-de-CAMP'S LIBRARY

---

*Accn. No. ....*

1. Books may be retained for a period not exceeding fifteen days.